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THE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN DANTE'S 'DIVINA COMMEDIA'

BY

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO MY BROTHER

HENRY CLARENCE KUHNS

AS A

SLIGHT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS

UNFAILING KINDNESS

DURING MY STUDENT YEARS

PREFACE

IN the following discussion I have endeavoured to give a practically complete picture of all those aspects of animate and inanimate Nature which Dante has made use of in the *Divina Commedia*. While it would have been comparatively easy to arrange the facts in tabulated form for reference merely, I have thought it worth while to attempt the far more difficult task of presenting the results of my investigations in such shape as might be read with some interest by the general student of literature. The difficulty and labour involved in reducing such a mass of material to the proper proportion demanded by such a treatment may be some excuse for the shortcomings of which I am myself only too conscious.

I have ventured to make my own translations, not that I am so bold as to think that they are in any way better than those of Cary, Longfellow, and Professor Norton, but because, using the passages for certain specific purposes, I could shape the translation so as better to illustrate the point I was making in each case.

In defining Nature as used in this book, I cannot do better than quote from Mr. Shairp,

'On Poetic Interpretation of Nature':—'By Nature, then, I understand the whole sum of appearances which reach us, which are made known to us, primarily through the senses. It includes all the intimations we have through sense of that great entity which lies outside of ourselves, but with which we have so much to do. For my present purpose I do not include man, either his body or his mind, as part of Nature, but regard him rather as standing out from Nature, and surveying and using that great external entity which encompasses and confronts him at every turn, he being the contemplator, Nature the thing contemplated.'

In conclusion, I wish to express my sense of gratitude to Professor Charles Eliot Norton, the most distinguished of American Dante scholars, who, although I was a stranger to him, consented, with rare kindness and courtesy, to read my MS. I have re-written parts of the book, and revised the rest in the light of his suggestions and corrections, and whatever value it may have is largely due to him. I would also acknowledge publicly my obligations to Mr. Irville C. Le Compte for aid in reading the proof and in verifying citations.

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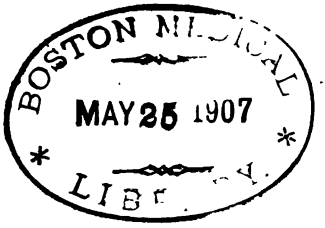

CHAPTER I

DANTE'S CONCEPTION OF NATURE

DANTE uses the word Nature in the *Divina Commedia* with a variety of meanings. While some of these have but little to do with the subject of this book, it may not be without value, nevertheless, to give a brief discussion of them all, and in this way to obtain a more complete view of what Nature meant to him.

In the first place, the poet uses the term, as we do to-day, to express the peculiar characteristics, the properties, disposition, and inclination of a thing, as the *natura del loco*,[1] *natura malvagia e ria*[2] (referring to a wolf), and *natura larga*[3] (referring to Charles II., King of Naples).

Umana natura expresses the sum of all those qualities which differentiate man from

[1] *Inf.*, xvi. 17; cf. also *natura del monte*, *Purg.*, xxvii. 74; also *Par.*, xxiii. 42.

[2] *Inf.*, i. 97.

[3] *Par.*, viii. 82.

animals, although sometimes it means simply mankind,[1] or the human race,[2] and once it seems to be a circumlocution for life.[3] A further extension of the same idea is the application of the term nature to angels[4] and to God, who is called variously the *divina*, *miglior*, and *universale natura*.[5]

The most important sense, however, in which the word is used is the philosophical or metaphysical one, and this use is by far the most frequent. In general, Dante's conception of Nature is like that of Aristotle, whom he, through S. Thomas Aquinas, follows closely.

In sharply distinguishing between Nature and God, however, Dante differs in an important respect from the ancients, with whom the distinction between the two is often confused.[6] Christianity had supplied the poet

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[1] *Par.*, xxxiii. 4.

[2] *Purg.*, xxviii. 78. In similar manner, all beings whatsoever are called *tutte nature* (*Par.*, i. 110).

[3] 'Dell' umana natura posto in bando' (*Inf.*, xv. 81). In *Convito*, iii. 4, it is used as a synonym for Nature herself.

[4] *Par.*, xxix. 71; the whole body of angels are referred to in the words—

'Questa natura sì oltre s'ingrada
In numero' (*Par.*, xxix. 130-131).

[5] *Par.*, xiii. 26; *Purg.*, xvi. 79; 'La natura universale, cioè Iddio' (*Convito*, iii. 4).

[6] Cicero defines nature as 'principium et causa efficiens

with the keystone of the universe, and his system is clear and symmetrical and free from the ambiguity of Aristotle. The general relation of Nature to the world, according to Dante, is something as follows:—

Outside the nine crystalline spheres, which revolve with different degrees of rapidity about the motionless earth, the divine essence of God exists in the form of a point of ineffable light, in which is contained all life and power, and from which

'Depend the heavens and all Nature.'[1]

About this point revolve the nine orders of the celestial hierarchy,[2] who transmit its light and love to the various heavens, which in their turn hand it down from one to another, until it reaches the terrestrial sphere.[3]

---

omnium rerum naturalium, quo sensu a veteribus philosophis cum Deo confundebatur' (*De Nat. Deorum*).

Cf. also Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, II. ii. p. 389.

[1] *Par.*, xxviii. 42.

[2] A detailed account of the nine orders of angels is given in *Par.*, xxviii.

[3] 'Questi organi del mondo così vanno,
Come tu vedi omai, di grado in grado,
Che di su prendono, e di sotto fanno.'
(*Par.*, ii. 121-123.)

Goethe seems to express the same idea in the lines—

'Wie Himmelskräfte auf und nieder steigen,
Und sich die goldenen Eimer reichen.'
(*Faust*, i. 96, 97.)

God is the Creator, the Preserver, and the Ruler of all things, but His power is exerted by means of intermediate agents; the heavens are ruled by the angels,[1] while purely terrestrial phenomena come under the direction of Nature.[2]

Hence we see that Nature in her workings does not include God, who is the Source whence she comes,[3] or the angels and the heavens, which are the direct creations of His power.[4] The term is rather applied to those processes by which all earthly things come into being, and her activity is engaged in producing those forms which are shaped out of original matter, itself primarily created by God.[5] The

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[1] 'Fece li cieli, e diè lor chi conduce' (*Inf.*, vii. 74). Cf. also, 'Li movitori di quello sono substanze separate da materia, cioè intelligenze, le quali la volgare gente chiama angeli' (*Convito*, ii. 5. Cf. also *Par.*, viii. 34; xxviii. 76-78).

The active virtue of the revolving heavens is called in one place *la circular natura* (*Par.*, viii. 127).

[2] This is exactly what Brunetto Latini says: 'Il establi nature desouz soi, qui ordone toutes les choses dou ciel en aval' (*Li Trésor*, Chabaille's ed., p. 148). Cf. however, pp. 149, 150, where he says, 'Nature causes to move the firmament, stars,' etc.

[3] *Inf.*, xi. 99, 100; also *De Mon.*, ii. 7: 'natura . . . cum sit opus divinae intelligentiae.'

[4] *Par.*, xxix. 22, where *forma pura* means the angels; also *Inf.*, vii. 74.

[5] 'Creata fu la materia ch' egli hanno' (*Par.*, vii. 136).

In the *De Monarchiâ*, Dante says that the word nature does

difference between the functions of Nature and God in this respect is expressed in the single line—

'That which He creates or Nature makes.'[1]

The activity of Nature is limited, not only in being excluded from participation in celestial operations, but even in her own sphere.[2] Not only does her power cease at the Gate of Purgatory;[3] but the influence of the stars, the direct intervention of God, and the operation of Fortune, all tend to modify the results of her activity.

Dante's philosophical conception of Nature is based upon that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who defines it as the *principium motus et quietis in eo in quo est primo et per se*.[4] By motion here

---

not properly apply to the matter, but only to the form of a thing (iii. 14).

[1] *Par.*, iii. 87. For the distinction between the productions of Nature, which are secondary and temporal, and those of God, which are direct and eternal, see the important passage in *Par.*, vii. 124 ff.

[2] We are expressly told this in *Convito*, iv. 9: 'E non è da maravigliare, che l'ufficio e l'arte della natura finito in tutte le sue operazioni vedemo.'

[3] *Purg.*, xxi. 43 ff.

[4] See Carbonel, *Divi Thomæ Aquinatis excerpta philosophica*, tomus i. p. 953; also p. 977. Cf. also Zeller, *Phil. der Griechen*, II. ii. p. 386, for Aristotle's almost identical definition.

generation and decay are especially meant;[1] hence the principle of motion is in a certain sense the principle of life. Although Dante never confuses this principle of life with God, he is inconsistent in treating it sometimes as passive, sometimes as active and independent. At times it seems to be merely the processes of Nature, as when it is called the art of God;[2] at others it is His instrument, while He is the Divine Artist who plans and produces all things.[3] On the other hand, Nature is frequently personified, and has all the attributes of a thinking, deliberating being; she is herself referred to as an artist, and seems to work independently.[4]

---

[1] 'Io veggio l'acqua, io veggio il fuoco,
L'aer e la terra, e tutte lor misture
Venire a corruzione, e durar poco.'
(*Par.*, vii. 124-126.)

See also Brunetto Latini: 'Et sor ce dist li philosophes que les euvres de nature sont en 6 manieres; ce sont: Generacion, corrupcion, accroissement, diminucion, alteracion, muement d'un leu en autre' (*Li Trésor*, p. 149).

[2] *Par.*, x. 10, 11.

[3] *De Mon.*, ii. 2. Cf. also, 'Natura est quoddam instrumentum Dei moventis' (St. Thos. Aq., quoted by Scartazzini in note to *Purg.*, xxv. 71).

The reference to Nature as a hammer in *Par.*, ii. 128, is probably due to Brunetto Latini (*Trésor*, p. 104).

[4] Thus the sun is called—
'Lo ministro maggior della natura' (*Par.*, x. 28).

The activity of Nature is constant[1] and regular; like tends to produce like;[2] and whatever is irregular is due to Fortune (another of God's ministers), or to the direct interposition of God Himself (as in the case of miracles).[3] Again, the processes of Nature are not blind and uncertain. She is good and beneficent;[4] she works with a certain definite aim, and everything she does has a purpose.[5] Thus the leaves of the vine are made to protect the fruit;[6] the hand, the arm, man, the family, the city, the kingdom, and the whole human race, all have their specific end,[7] which end in every

---

And it is Nature who

'Lasciò l'arte

Di sì fatti animali' (elephants and whales) (*Inf.*, xxxi. 49, 50).

[1] 'Perchè impossibil veggio

Che la natura, in quel ch'è uopo, stanchi.'

(*Par.*, viii. 113-115.)

Cf. also *Convito*, iv. 24, 'Natura, che non vien meno.'

[2] *Par.*, viii. 133-135. Cf. 'In agentibus naturalibus forma generati est conformis formae generantis' (St. Thos. Aq., quoted by Scartazzini, note to *Par.*, viii. 133).

[3] *Par.*, xxiv. 101-102.

[4] 'La buona natura' (*Convito*, iv. 24).

[5] 'Propter quod bene philosophus, naturam semper agere propter finem, in secundo de naturali auditu probat' (*De Mon.* ii. 7. Cf. also *Par.*, viii. 103-105, and Carbonel, i. 972-975).

[6] 'Siccome vedemo che dà (*i.e.* Nature) alla vite le foglie per difensione del frutto' (*Convito*, iv. 24).

[7] *De Mon.*, i. 4.

case is perfection.[1] The ultimate aim of all creation is God Himself, the fountain of all goodness.[2]

This aim, however, is not always accomplished; where it fails, the blame does not fall on God or Nature, both of whom are perfect; but upon the imperfect matter, as in the case of a plant in bad soil or an artist working on poor material.[3] In the case of man it is to evil conduct that the cause of the failure is attributed.[4]

It is interesting to note what are the products of Nature's activity especially mentioned by Dante. While theoretically all terrestrial things are due to her,[5] in point of fact the poet almost invariably speaks of man as the result of her operations. Nor is this strange when we consider that to him man is the measure of all things in the universe. He is the animal that Nature loves most,[6] the most perfect of her

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[1] 'Natura universale che ordina la particulare alla sua perfezione' (*Convito*, iv. 26).

[2] *Par.*, i. 107.

[3] *Par.*, xiii. 76-78; *Ibid.* i. 127-129; *Ibid.* viii. 139-141.

[4] *Purg.*, xvi. 103-105. Cf. *Convito*, iii. 4: 'La mala disposizione della materia.'

[5] *Par.*, vii. 124 ff.

[6] 'Agli animali fè ch'ella ha più cari' (*Purg.*, xxix. 138). Cf.

productions,[1] the crown and chief end of creation.[2] When the child is born, God Himself rejoices over so great a work of Nature.[3]

The natural processes involved in the birth and development of the human body are given in detail in the *Purgatorio*,[4] and in addition to this we have many references to Nature's activity in this respect.[5] But she not only makes the body of man, but also gives him his instincts, appetites,[6] love for his fellow-man,[7] love of and capacity for pleasure,[8] and even the hope of immortality.[9] She likewise furnishes

---

also *Convito*, iii. 2: 'L'uomo è divino animale da' filosofi chiamato.'

[1] 'La natura umana è perfettissima di tutte le altre nature di quaggiù;' and, 'l'uomo è perfettissimo di tutti gli animali' (*Convito*, ii. 9).

[2] *Convito*, iii. 8.

[3] *Purg.*, xxv. 70, 71. Dante says in the *Convito* that man is not to be praised for the beauty of his person, but 'Dovemo lodare l'artefice, cioè la natura umana, che'n tanta bellezza produce la sua materia' (iii. 4).

[4] *Purg.*, xxv. 37 ff.

[5] *Purg.*, xxv. 60; also *De Mon.*, i. 4.

[6] *Convito*, iv. 22: 'Quello (appetito) che pur da natura nudamente viene.'

[7] 'Quel amor s'obblia
Che fa natura' (*Inf.*, xi. 61, 62; cf. also line 56).

[8] 'Ma fieti diletto
Quanto Natura a sentir ti dispose' (*Purg.*, xv. 32, 33).

[9] E ancora sequiterebbe, che la natura, . . . questa speranza nella mente umana posta avesse' (*Convito*, ii. 9).

each individual with his peculiar disposition, character, aptitude,[1] and makes one man fit for a preacher, another for an orator, another for a warrior, another for a king.[2] In similar manner she gives the various nations their own peculiar functions—some being made to rule, and others to obey.[3]

Especially is the beauty of the body looked upon as a triumph of her art,[4] hence an ugly body is called a defect of Nature.[5] This beauty reaches its highest point in woman, and to Dante the most beautiful work of Nature is Beatrice.[6]

---

[1] 'Al fondamento che natura pone' (*Par.*, viii. 143).

[2] *Ibid.* 145-147. Only here men do not take advantage of their natural aptitudes, and hence one who might have made a good warrior becomes a bad priest.

[3] *De Mon.*, ii. 3.

[4] In the *Convito* (i. 5) we are told in what this beauty consists: 'Onde pare l'uomo essere bello, quando le sue membre debitamente rispondono.'

[5] 'Peccato della natura' (*Convito*, iii. 4).

[6] 'Ella è quanto di ben può far natura;
Per esempio di lei beltà si prova.'
(*La vita Nuova*, § xix.)

To the mediæval poet woman is far more beautiful than any other object of Nature; it is a common thing for troubadours and minnesingers to say that she is fairer than a day in spring, with all its flowers and birds. Cf. Walther von der Vogelweide—

'Der meie bringe uns al sîn wunder,
Waz ist dâ sô wünneclîches under,
Als ir vil minneclîcher lîp?

There are several passages which at first sight might seem to be in contradiction to the above remarks. Take, for instance, the following:—

'E se natura od arte fè pasture
Da pigliar occhi, etc.'[1]

Reading this in a modern poet, we should naturally interpret it as meaning the beauty of landscape, of mountain, sea, or sky. But the words *in carne umana* show us that Dante really referred to the beauty of the female form. This is also true of the passage where Beatrice refers to her beauty on earth, in the words—

'Mai non t'appresentò natura ed arte
Piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch'io
Rinchiusa fui.'[2]

Wir lâzen alle bluomen stân,
Und kapfen an dez werde wîp.'
(*Frühling und Frauen.*)

Cf. also—

'Pus bela que bels jorns de may,
Solelhs de mars,' etc.
(Mahn, *Werke der Troubadours*, i. p. 155.)

[1] *Par.*, xxvii. 91 ff.

[2] *Purg.*, xxxi. 49-51. We find the same idea expressed in Provençal literature—

'Dona la genser creatura
Que anc formes el mon natura.'
(Mahn, i. p. 155.)

And

'Hom no'l pot lauzar tan gen
Cum la saup formar natura' (*Ibid.* p. 27).

Similar interpretation must be given to the lines—

'Che non pur Policleto,
Ma la natura lì avrebbe scorno.'[1]

While Capocchio, who is called *di natura buona scimia*, is simply a counterfeiter.[2]

But man is not entirely the product of Nature; the most important part of his being, the immortal soul, is the direct creation of God.[3] Hence when man dies his body succumbs to Nature's laws and passes away;[4] while his soul either descends to the banks of the Acheron, there to be assigned to its eternal place of punishment, or makes its way to the mouth of the Tiber, there to be carried over the distant ocean to the shores of Purgatory.[5]

Such, then, is the use that Dante makes of

---

[1] *Purg.*, x. 32, 33.

[2] *Inf.*, xxix. 139. All this throws an important light on the function of art in the Middle Ages. The Greeks had imitated the beauty of the body almost to the exclusion of other things, so too the early Italian artists took only human subjects for their art. Even Michael Angelo loved the body more than nature.

[3] 'E spira
Spirito nuovo di virtù repleto' (*Purg.*, xxv. 71-75).
Also—
'Esce di mano a Lui, che la vagheggia
Prima che sia . . .
. . . . . .
L'anima semplicetta' (*Ibid.*, xvi. 85-88).
Cf. also *Par.*, vii. 67-75.

[4] *Purg.*, xxxi. 50-51.

[5] *Ibid.*, xxv. 85-86.

Nature in the *Divina Commedia.* There is practically no evidence that he ever employed it in the modern acceptation of the physical world about us—the outward show of sea and sky, of river, hill, and stream and flower.

He refers to her invariably from a philosophical and scientific, and not from an æsthetic standpoint, as the modern poet and painter would do.[1]

We see, therefore, that for the purposes of the present discussion[2] we can get no help from direct references of Dante to Nature, but must gather together all those bits of description scattered through the *Divina Commedia,* and deduce from them his attitude toward her. This is what we shall endeavour to do in the following chapters.

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[1] In the two passages which bear any resemblance at all to the modern use, one seems to mean merely natural fruits, or agricultural products—

'Per sè natura e per la sua seguace' (*Inf.*, xi. 110).

In the beautiful scene in the Valley of Princes a modern poet would have spoken of the loveliness of Nature herself. Dante, consistent with his conception of her as an active agent, says not only had she painted the ground with many coloured flowers, but she had added a sweet odour made up of a thousand different perfumes (*Purg.*, vii. 79).

[2] For definition of Nature as employed in this discussion, see Preface, p. vi.

CHAPTER II

DANTE'S CONVENTIONAL TREATMENT OF NATURE

IN the discussion of any literary topic, the first and all-important question is the establishment of a method. It not seldom occurs in these days of excessive specialisation that the laudable desire for thoroughness destroys that sense of proportion which is essential to any literary work. In the discussion, for instance, of such a subject as the treatment of Nature in the *Divina Commedia*, the mere enumeration of the various references to natural phenomena in the poem will tend rather to confuse the mind of the reader than to give him any clear idea of Dante's feeling toward the world of Nature. To obtain such an idea only those references must be considered which reveal conscious observation and personal interest on the part of the poet. Hence a preliminary step in any such investigation must be the

elimination of all those passages descriptive of Nature which are more or less conventional. By conventionality I mean the use of those figures or metaphors which the poet takes from Nature, without seeing himself the actual scene described, or feeling the emotion usually created by it; such metaphors being, for the most part, directly imitated from previous writers or belonging to the general *materia poetica* of the times. These figures may often be of extreme beauty, may be in a sense original, in that they produce a certain effect on the mind and imagination of the reader which has never been made before. But the important thing to notice is that they have very little to do with Nature herself. The charm can only be appreciated by educated readers: the memories that are stirred are those reminiscential of classical studies rather than those which come from the actual object referred to. This is especially true of general, well-known phenomena such as sunset and sunrise. Compare, for instance, the lines:—

'La concubina di Titone antico
Già s'imbiancava al balzo d'oriente
Fuor delle braccia del suo dolce amico.

(*Purg.*, ix. 1-3.)

with Vergil—

'Aut ubi pallida surget
Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile.[1]
(*Georg.*, i. 446, 447.)

Often we find a mingling of personal observation and conventionality in the same passage. Thus the description of the *Paradiso Terrestre* is perhaps the most beautiful in the *Divina Commedia*, and one of the loveliest in all literature; yet all the details were common property in the Middle Ages—the flowers springing from the grass, the transparent stream, the grateful shade cast by the murmuring trees, the singing of the birds.[2] Compare with the well-known passage of Dante[3] the following lines of Walter von der Vogelweide:—

'Dô der sumer komen was
Und die bluomen dur daz gras
Wünneclîchen sprungen,
Aldâ die vogele sungen,
Dar kom ich gegangen
An einen anger langen,
Dâ ein lûter brunne entspranc:

[1] Cf. also *Æneid*, ix. 458.

[2] I cannot understand what Mr. Ruskin means when he says that Dante's use of birds in this description has been imitated by all following poets (*Modern Painters*, vol. III. ch. xiv.).

[3] *Purg.*, xxviii.

Vor dem walde was sîn ganc,
Dâ diu nahtegale sanc';[1]

and the almost identical language of Bernart de Ventadour:—

'En abril quan vey verdeyar
Los pratz vertz, e'ls vergiers florir,
E vey las aiguas esclarzir,
E aug los auzels alegrar;
L'odor de l'erba floria,
E'l dous chan que l'auzels cria
Mi fan mon joy renovelhar.'[2]

Yet the scene described by Dante is taken out of the limits of mere conventionality by the consummate skill with which he uses his material, and by the atmosphere of ineffable poetry with which he has surrounded it. In the following examples from Dante I do not mean to say that often the poet has not given the result of his own observation, but that the reader is more or less reminded of similar scenes elsewhere. In many cases we cannot

[1] W. von der Vogelweide, herausgegeben und erklärt von W. Wilmanns, 1883, p. 340.

[2] Mahn, *Die Werke der Troubadours*, i. p. 46. We find likewise the same details used in a description of a June morning by Robert Henryson, a Scotch poet of the fifteenth century. Veitch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, vol. i. p. 211.

tell whether a certain description or metaphor is due to mere coincidence or to imitation. No doubt what Washington Irving says of himself in the Preface to the *Tales of a Traveller*[1] is true of Dante as well as of every poet.

Dante was an ardent student of the Classics; he was steeped in the lore of the Bible, and one of the chief aims of art in his day was to follow closely in the footprints of the great masters. In the art of painting, the influence of the Byzantine School was still powerful, although Cimabue and Giotto had given it the impulse towards that study of Nature which was fraught with the possibility of infinite development. In literature, anonymous writers multiplied copies and expansions of old romances, translated the Latin Bestiaries and Lapidaries, or repeated the eternal rhapsodies of springtime and summer, birds and flowers and ladies fair. Philosophy was summarised in the famous compendium of scholasticism, the *Summa Theologiæ* of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the science of those days comprised only the

[1] 'I am an old traveller; I have read somewhat, heard and seen more, and dreamt more than all. . . . So that when I attempt to draw forth a fact, I cannot determine whether I have read, heard or dreamt it.'

superstitions and strange stories told of fabulous beasts, marvellous stones and plants, and the wonderful machinery of the Ptolemaic system.

The wonder, then, is not that Dante has so many conventional references to Nature, but that in spite of the artificiality of the times, he gives such striking evidence of close personal observation of the world about him. This wonder is only increased when we compare him with his contemporaries, whose references to Nature are meagre, general and entirely conventional.

The two main sources from which Dante drew were the Bible and the classical writers. The influence of the former shows itself in various ways. In the first place, the poet's whole conception of the relation of Nature and the Universe to God is drawn from Holy Scripture. The framework of the world, the scientific and the astronomical conception of it, is due to Ptolemy and the Arabian philosophers; but the God who dwells outside the revolving spheres of Heaven and who directs their movements is the God of the Bible, the Creator and Preserver of all things.

But besides this general influence of the

Bible on the structure of the *Divina Commedia*, it has furnished the poet with many figures, metaphors and descriptions. Mr. Shairp has said that language contains fossilised observations of natural phenomena: sky, mountain, river and sea, furnish figures which have become part of the very bone and sinew of speech. In addition to these, however, there are still other figures, drawn from Nature, and of later origin than the first class (which usually date from prehistoric times); these latter were used first by Greek, Latin or Biblical writers; then by frequent repetition, having been introduced into general use, have finally lost the power of calling up any image of Nature, and have become mere rhetorical expressions. Such are many figures drawn from sea or sun, moon or stars.[1] These metaphors are especially frequent in the Biblical writers, and we may assuredly attribute to their influence the large number of examples which are found in Dante.[2]

An interesting example of the symbolic use of Nature is seen in the apple-tree, which

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[1] Cf. for example the metaphors drawn from the moon outshining the stars, and the melting of snow in the sun.

[2] For instance, the symbolical use of the sun for God, of light for truth.

stands variously in the *Divina Commedia* for Christ, for Adam, and for the Roman Empire. Thus we find in the *Purgatorio*, where the Transfiguration is alluded to, the Saviour symbolised in the following lines:

> 'Quale a veder li fioretti del melo,
> Che del suo pomo gli angeli fa ghiotti.'
> (xxxii. 73-74.)

The mystic tree in the same canto, which represents the Roman Empire, is also an apple-tree, as may be seen from the exquisite lines in which the peculiarly delicate shade of apple-blossoms is so wonderfully depicted.[1] In the *Paradiso* Adam is addressed as follows:

> '. . . O pomo, che maturo
> Solo prodotto fosti, o padre antico.'
> (xxvi. 91-92.)

While the apple-tree was considered sacred among the Romans,[2] there can be little doubt that Dante took his use of it from the Bible;

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[1] Men che di rose e più che di vïole
Colore aprendo. . . .
(*Purg.*, xxxii. 58-59.)

[2] The apple was sacred to Venus, whose statues sometimes bore a poppy in one hand and an apple in the other. To dream of apples was deemed by lovers of good omen.

thus, compare with the above citations the *Song of Solomon* (ii. 3):—

'As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.'

The literary or symbolical use of the lamb for innocence, the wolf for rapacity, will be treated later in connection with Vergil. Let it suffice in this place to mention the resemblance of the first canto in the *Inferno*, where Dante is driven back from the mountain by the wolf, the lion and the panther, with Jeremiah, chap. v. ver. 6:

'A lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities.'

The classical writers exerted a strong and direct influence on Dante's thought and style. Homer, Plato, Aristotle were known to him only through Latin translations or quotations in other writers. His acquaintance with Latin literature, however, considering the difficulty of pursuing study during the Middle Ages, was marvellous.

Calculations have been made of the references

in Dante's works to the classical writers, and it has been found that

'the Vulgate is quoted or referred to more than 500 times, Aristotle more than 300, Vergil about 200, Ovid about 100, Cicero and Lucan about fifty each, Statius and Boethius between thirty and forty each, Horace, Livy and Orosius between ten and twenty each; with a few scattered references, probably not exceeding ten in the case of any one author, to Homer, Juvenal, Seneca, Ptolemy, Æsop and St. Augustine.'[1]

Among this mass of quotations we may naturally expect to find a number which refer to Nature.

These authors, in the first place, surrounded Dante's view of Nature with a learned and classic atmosphere: on seeing, for instance, a certain phenomenon, his mind would instantly recur to some passage of Vergil or Ovid, and it is this fact he tells us about, rather than the actual details of the scene in question.

Again, although mythology as a religion had died out, it still lives on in the *Divina Commedia* as a means of ornament and illustration: —often in the strangest kind of juxtaposition

[1] See *Edinburgh Review* for April 1895, p. 286; cf. also *Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik*, ii. Abth., xi. Jahrg., p. 253 ff.

with Christianity, and we hear even the Almighty himself addressed as 'Sommo Giove.' As we wander over the supernatural world of Dante, we meet constantly with naiad, nymph, and river-god; fabulous monsters are seen on every side: harpies, dragons, Centaurs, Cerberus, Pluto, the Minotaur. Of course Dante's use of these is entirely different from that of Homer, or even that of Vergil and Ovid.

The poet whose influence Dante felt most in his descriptions of Nature (as in everything else) is Vergil; that he knew the *Æneid* almost by heart is proved, not only by evidence, but by his own express statements.[1] There can be no doubt that the *Divina Commedia* is saturated with not only the incidents and ideas, but even the diction of Vergil. The number of direct quotations is very large, but besides these there are innumerable passages which show an unconscious, or only half conscious imitation. This influence is seen at work in the description of morning and evening, in the constant reference to mythology, and in the many metaphors drawn from animal life. In certain cases, even if we cannot point to any direct

[1] *Inf.*, i. 83-87, xx. 114; and *Purg.*, xxi. 97-98.

imitation, it is evident that Dante's view has been coloured by Vergil. As an instance of the above statements, take the metaphorical use of sheep and wolf; while in this respect Dante follows not only the Bible, but also the traditions of Greek, Roman, and Mediæval literature,[1] we find in particular some very striking imitations of Vergil. Compare, for instance, the following lines:

'Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
Sembiava carca. . . .'

(*Inf.*, i. 49-50),

with those of Vergil:

'. . . Collecta fatigat edendi
Ex longo rabies, et siccae sanguine fauces.'

(*Æn.*, ix. 62-63.)

The references to sheep as symbolical of the followers of Christ, and to the wolf in sheep's clothing for false teachers, are, of course, Scriptural in their origin.

Homer and Vergil in their pictures of rural

[1] The wolf is everywhere mentioned with hate: Vergil's words:—

'Triste lupus stabulis'

(*Eclog.*, iii. 80),

are typical of both the Greek and Roman and of the Mediæval view of the rapacity of that restless enemy of the sheep: always fierce, famished, prowling around the sheepfold. In Homer the lion shares with the wolf the fears and hostility of the shepherds.

life often introduce the farmer or shepherd as a witness of the phenomena described, and there are several passages in the *Divina Commedia* which show the same treatment.

Compare:

'. . . Aut rapidus montano flumine torrens
Sternit agros, sternit sata laeta boumque labores
Praecipitesque trahit silvas, stupet inscius alto
Accipiens sonitum saxi de vertice *pastor*[1]
(*Æn.*, ii. 305-308);

and:

'Non altrimenti fatto, che d'un vento
Impetuoso per gli·avversi ardori,
Che fier la selva, e senza alcun rattento
Gli rami schianta, abbatte, e porta fuori;
Dinanzi polveroso va superbo,
E fa fuggir le fiere ed i *pastori*.'
(*Inf.*, ix. 67-72.)

In similar manner the farmer is seen filled with dismay in that realistic scene in the

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[1] Cf. also:—

'Qual istordito e stupido aratore,
Poi ch'è passato il fulmine, si leva
Di là dove l'altissimo fragore
Presso alli morti buoi steso l'aveva'
(Ariosto, *Orl. Fur.*, i. 65, 1-4),

and:—

'Lorsque le laboureur, regagnant sa chaumière,
Trouve le soir son champ rasé par le tonnerre,
Il croit d'abord qu'un rêve a fasciné ses yeux.'
(A. de Musset, *Lettre à Lamartine.*)

Inferno, xxiv. 4 and ff., where the heavy frost looks like snow in the morning and threatens to bring ruin to the crops.

The influence of Vergil is further shown in the references to other animals. Take, for instance, the passage descriptive of a wounded bull:

'Quale quel toro, che si slaccia in quella
C'ha ricevuto lo colpo mortale,
Che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella'
(*Inf.*, xii. 22-24),

and compare it with:

'Qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram
Taurus et incertam excussit cervice securim.'
(*Æn.*, ii. 223-224.)

So the boar chased by dogs:

'Similemente a colui, che venire
Sente 'l porco e la caccia alla sua posta,
Ch'ode le bestie, e le frasche stormire'
(*Inf.*, xiii. 112-114),

reminds us of Vergil's lines:

'Ac velut ille canum morsu de montibus altis
Actus aper . . .' (*Æn.*, x. 707-708.)

Of course it is not in my province to discuss at length this whole question of Dante's indebtedness to Vergil; I simply point out some of the most striking resemblances, without

seeking to make a complete list of them. I may be allowed, however, to refer to what may be more properly designated as verbal resemblances in the references to Nature. The detailed description of a storm in *Purg.*, v. 113 and ff., finds a counterpart in several passages of Vergil and Ovid; but there seems to be something more than mere coincidence in the resemblance between the lines:

'La pioggia cadde; ed a' fossati venne
Di lei ciò che la terra non sofferse'
(*Purg.*, v. 119-120),

and Vergil's:

'. . . Implentur fossae et cava flumina crescunt.'
(*Georg.*, i. 326.)

The line:

'. . . Il tremolar della marina'
(*Purg.*, i. 117),

finds a parallel in

'. . . Splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.'
(*Æn.*, vii. 9.)

So the lines in *Inf.*, ii. 1 ff., where the approach of night brings the hour of rest for men and animals:

'Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aer bruno
Toglieva gli animai, che sono in terra,
Dalle fatiche loro . . .'
(*Inf.*, ii. 1-3),

recall similar lines in Vergil:

> 'Cetera per terras omnis animalia somno
> Laxabant curas et corda oblita laborum'
> (*Æn.*, ix. 222-223);

and:

> Nox erat et terris animalia somnus habebat.'
> (*Æn.*, iii. 147.)

The phenomenon of the stars fading at the approach of dawn is common enough, and we need not be surprised to find parallels to the *Divina Commedia, Par.*, xxx. 7 and ff., not only in Vergil (*Æn.*, iii. 521), but also in Lucan (ii. 72), Ariosto (xxxvii. 86), and Tasso (xviii. 12).[1]

Some of the most famous of Dante's pictures, although in large part made original by his own genius, are evidently reminiscences of Vergil. This is especially true of the exquisite figure of the doves in the *Inf.*, v. 82-84, whose prototype is *Æn.*, v. 213-217; and also of the famous metaphor of the souls preparing to enter Charon's boat (*Inf.*, iii. 112-114, reproducing the same idea as that in the *Æn.*, vi. 309-312).

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[1] Cf. Magistretti, *Il Fuoco e la Luce nella Divina Commedia.* Firenze, 1888.

But Dante owes suggestions for metaphors taken from Nature to other Latin writers. Although his references to Horace are few, we find a repetition of the latter's famous figure of woods and leaves (*Ars Poet.*, 60-62) in

> 'Chè l'uso de' mortali è come fronda
> In ramo, che sen va, ed altra viene.'
> (*Par.*, xxvi. 137-138.)

In similar manner we find several metaphors of Nature which are evidently suggested by Ovid. As already noted, the direct and indirect references to this poet in all of Dante's works amount to about an hundred. For his mythology Dante is chiefly indebted to him, and nearly all the allusions to Cerberus, Phœnix, and the gods and goddesses can be traced to the *Metamorphoses*. Portions of the beautiful scene in *Purg.*, xxviii. 40 and ff., may have been suggested by the story of Proserpina in *Met.*, v. 388 ff. Cf. especially the lines:

> 'Una Donna soletta, che si gía
> Cantando ed iscegliendo fior da fiore'
> (xxviii. 40-41),

with

> '. . . Quo dum Proserpina luco
> Ludit, et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit.'
> (v. 391-392.)

The words *primaver* and *perpetuum ver*, which are found in these passages, may be taken as indicating some connection between the two.

It is probable that Dante also had Ovid in mind when he tells us how the Earth looked when seen from the starry sphere:

'L'aiuola . . .

. . . . .

Tutta m'apparve da' colli alle foci.'[1]

(*Par.*, xxii. 151-153.)

In the *Metamorphoses* there are several similar passages,—chief among which is that where unlucky Phaëthon is described:

'. . . Medio est altissima caelo,
Unde mare et terras ipsi mihi saepe videre.'

(*Met.*, ii. 64-65.)

So also the scene where Perseus flies through the sky and

'Despectat terras totumque supervolat orbem'

(*Met.*, iv. 624),

and the line:

'Quae freta, quas terras sub se vidisset ab alto.

(*Met.*, iv. 788.)

The various scenes of the transformation of

[1] Cf. also *Par.*, xxvii. 79 and ff.

snakes into men, and *vice versâ*, are imitated from Ovid.

A very interesting verbal resemblance is seen in the line in which the dim light of the eighth circle is described, as

'. . . Men che notte e men che giorno'
(*Inf.*, xxxi. 10);

with which compare:

'Quod tu nec tenebras nec posses dicere lucem.'
(*Met.*, iv. 400.)

I have already compared the famous figure of the leaves in the *Inferno* to Vergil, but a similar figure is also seen in:

'Non citius frondes autumni frigore tactas
Iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore ventus,
Quam sunt membra viri manibus direpta nefandis.'
(*Met.*, iii. 729-731.)

So, too, of a falling star we find:

'Di prima notte mai fender sereno'
(*Purg.*, v. 38);

whilst Phaëthon falls:

'. . . Ut interdum de caelo stella sereno.'[1]
(*Met.*, ii. 321.)

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[1] This is a very common metaphor; cf.—
'Quam solet aethereo lampas decurrere sulco' (Lucan, x.);
and also: '. . . And with the setting sun
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling star.'
(Milton, *Par. Lost*, i. 744-745.)
For other parallels see Magistretti, *l. c.*, pp. 300-301.

The tumbling of the dolphins, described as—

'Come i delfini, quando fanno segno
A' marinar con l'arco della schiena'
(*Inf.*, xxii. 19-20)

finds a parallel in—

'. . . Nec se super aequora curvi
Tollere consuetas audent delphines in auras.'
(*Met.*, ii. 265-266.)

So the *pianta senza seme* spoken of in *Purg.*, xxviii. 117, may have been suggested by the *natos sine semine flores* of Ovid, *Met.*, i. 108.

Now it may be that these resemblances (and many others which might be mentioned) are mere coincidences; but we must remember that Dante knew Vergil and Ovid thoroughly, and it is by no means improbable that in all the above cases he was influenced, more or less consciously, by them.

During the Middle Ages the literary use of Nature is confined chiefly to the lyrical poets.[1] Here, as elsewhere, the influence of the troubadours is deep and far-reaching. With them Nature was only an accessory of love, which formed the chief subject of their

[1] The references in Epic poetry are but few and meagre. Cf. Biese, *Die Entwickelung des Naturgefühls im Mittelalter und der Neuzeit*, p. 111; also Gautier, *La Chevalerie*, p. 455.

poetry. Almost every song begins with a description of the renewal of life at the coming of spring, the grass covering the hills with green, the trees budding, the flowers blooming, and the birds filling the air with their glad song.[1] Spring is the season of love, and amid the universal outburst of joy in Nature, the poet is moved to sing of his lady. If she loves him, he rejoices with the birds and flowers; if she treats him coldly, Nature cannot drive away his sadness.[2]

As a pendant to spring we have a similar conventional treatment of winter, in which the green hills are turned to white, the flowers die, and the leafless trees have become

'Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang.'[3]

We know that Dante was well acquainted

[1] Examples of this may be found on almost every page of Mahn's *Werke der Troubadours*, of the *Minnesang's Frühling*, and Bartsch's *Romanzen und Pastourellen*.

[2] This same contrast between Nature and unhappy love is expressed in later times by Heine and Burns. Cf. 'Die Welt ist so schön und der Himmel so blau,' etc., of the former, and 'Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon' of the latter. Cf. with this poem of Burns, Peire Vidal—

'Venion frugz, venion flors,
E clar tempo e dossa sazos,
Et ieu m'estava cossiros.'
(*Mahn*, i. 250.)

[3] Shakespeare, Sonnet 73.

with the language and literature of the troubadours.[1] Just as we see their influence in the conventional ideas of love in the *Vita Nuova*,[2] so in Dante's lyrical poetry the whole treatment of Nature is that of the Provençal poets. Thus spring is the 'sweet time, which warms the hills, and changes them from white to green, covering them with flowers and grass';[3] again it is the '*Dolce tempo novello*, when love descends from the skies.'[4]

So, too, winter comes, the hills lose their colour, the snow falls, the leaves disappear, the

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[1] Cf. *De Vulg. Eloq.* Also *Purg.*, xxvi. 140 ff., where Arnaut Daniel answers the poet's inquiry, as to who he, is in Provençal. The following verbal resemblances between Dante and Daniel seem rather interesting:—

'Non ai membre no m fremisca ni ongla.'
(Mahn, ii. p. 70.)

Also—

'Non avea membro che tenesse fermo.'
(*Inf.*, vi. 24.)

'. . . Men che dramma
Di sangue m'e rimasa, che non tremi.'
(*Purg.*, xxx. 47.)

[2] Dante's effort to hide his love from others, his growing pale at Beatrice's greeting, his humility, his alternations of joy and sorrow, the uplifting effect of her beauty, etc. (Cf. Diez, *Poesie der Troubadours*, p. 126 ff.)

[3] Cf. Moore, *Tutte le opere di Dante*, p. 160.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 167. Cf. also the beautiful sonnet on p. 175. The expressions *novel temps*, *dous temps floritz*, *dous termini novelh* are frequent among the troubadours.

flowers die, and the birds fly away and are heard no more.[1]

Of course, there is a wide difference between the lyrical poetry of Dante and the *Divina Commedia*. Yet here, too, traces of the influence of the troubadours may be seen in the general way in which birds and flowers are used, in the phraseology,[2] and in the details of the Valley of Princes and the Earthly Paradise.

But when we have discussed the influence of the Bible and the Classics and troubadours on Dante, we have not yet exhausted the subject of his conventionality. He was as ardent a scientist as scholar, philosopher, theologian, and poet, and there is a wonderful blending of science and poetry in many of his descriptions of Nature. We should naturally expect, then, to find him influenced by the books of science of his day. In Zoology and Mineralogy these were the Bestiaries and Lapidaries. It is

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[1] Moore, p. 166. The poet, however, is happy in spite of the wintry season;—this is quite in the line of the troubadours. Cf. Peire Vidal—

'Neu ni gel, ni plueja ni fanh
No m tolon deport ni solatz.'

(Mahn, i. p. 232.)

[2] Lo dolce stagione (*Inf.*, i. 43), prato di fresca verdura (*Inf.*, iv. 111), fresche erbette (*Purg.*, xxix. 88), novella fronda (*Purg.*, xxxiii. 144), etc.

possible that he had read in French the famous Bestiaries of Philippe de Thaun and Guillaume le Clerc.[1] But even if he was not acquainted with these popular treatises, he certainly had read the *Trésor* of his master Brunetto Latini, for the last words which came to Dante from the 'dear, paternal image' of him who had taught him *come l'uom s'eterna*, were—

> 'Sieti raccomandato il mio *Tesoro*,
> Nel quale i' vivo ancora.' . . .
>
> (*Inf.*, xv. 119-120.)

It is extremely interesting to compare what Dante says of the phœnix, the dragon, the eagle, and other animals, with the description given by Brunetto. Although Dante obtained his ideas of the phœnix from Ovid, he may have still been affected by the descriptions given in the Bestiaries. Likewise to them many details of the more common beasts may be due; as, for instance, the picture of the eagle gazing fixedly into the sun—

> 'Aquila sì non gli s'affisse unquanco'[2]
>
> (*Par.*, i. 48);

[1] See Reinsch, *Le Bestiaire von Guillaume le Clerc.*

[2] Cipolla (*Studî Danteschi*, p. 6) quotes this passage as indicative of observation on the part of the poet; but the reference in question seems to me merely rhetorical and conventional.

whilst Brunetto's description is—

'Et sa nature est de esgarder contre le soleil si fermement que si oil ne remuent goute.'

(*Trésor*, p. 196.)

There seems scarcely any doubt that the passage already cited—

'Come i delfini, quando fanno segno
A' marinar con l'arco della schiena'

(*Inf.*, xxii. 19-20)

was also influenced by the following description:—

'Et par eulx (dolphins) aperçoivent li marinier la tempeste qui doit venir, quant il voient le dolphin fuir parmi la mer.'

(*Trésor*, p. 187.)

Compare also the following resemblances:—

'E come i gru van cantando lor lai,
Facendo in aer di sè lunga riga'

(*Inf.*, v. 46-47);

and—

'Grues sont oisiau qui volent a eschieles, en maniere de chevaliers qui vont en bataille.'

(*Trésor*, p. 215.)

'Sì come quando 'l colombo si pone
Presso al compagno, l'uno all'altro pande,
Girando e mormorando, l'affezione'

(*Par.*, xxv. 19-21);

and—

'E sachiez que la torterele est si amables vers son compaignon, etc.'[1]

(*Trésor*, p. 220.)

'Com'io fui di natura buona scimia'

(*Inf.*, xxix. 139);

and—

'Singes est une beste qui volentiers contre fait ce que elle voit faire as homes.'

(*Trésor*, p. 250.)

'. . . Per la qual vedessi
Non altrimenti che per pelle talpe'

(*Purg.*, xvii. 2-3);

and—

'Et sachiez que taupe ne voit goute, car nature ne volt pas ovrir la pel qui est sor ses oilz.'

(*Trésor*, p. 252.)[2]

Dante's use of the panther is not taken from the Bestiaries, where it is used symbolically for the Saviour, but rather from the leopard of the Bible, swift, subtle, fierce against men.

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[1] The affection of the turtle-dove is frequently alluded to in poetry; cf.—

'Like to a pair of loving turtle-doves
That could not live asunder day or night'

(Shakespeare, *I. Henry IV.* ii. 2);

and also *Winter's Tale*, iv. 4; and *Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 2.

[2] Dr. Schück (*Jahrbücher für Philologie und Paedogogik*, xcii., p. 282) says that it is not clear 'ob Dante, der das Werk kannte, besonderen Nutzen daraus gezogen haben kann.'

I think the above parallels prove that he did.

In his treatment of the animal world, Dante must also have been influenced by fables and the Beast Epic, both of which were so popular and widespread in the Middle Ages. Whether he knew personally the works of such writers as Marie de France and Walter of England, or not, it is at least evident that he was familiar with the subject-matter of the fables which they treated. In the Middle Ages the names of Æsop and Romulus were given to almost all collections of fables; in fact, these names had become traditional, just as Faust and Don Juan have become so in later times. Hence Dante, in alluding to the well-known fable of the *Frog and the Rat*, attributes it to Æsop—

'Vôlto era in su la favola d'Isopo
Lo mio pensier, per la presente rissa,
Dov' ei parlò della rana e del topo.'

(*Inf.*, xxiii. 4-6.)

Proverbs, too, furnished Dante with supposed characteristics of animal life. Thus we have the thoughtlessness of birds alluded to in the following lines:—

'Come fe il merlo per poca bonaccia'[1]

(*Purg.*, xiii. 123);

[1] Cf. Fraticelli, *in loc.*:—'Un' antica novella popolare diceva che un merlo, sentendo nel gennaio mitigato il freddo, credè

and

'Nuovo augelletto due o tre aspetta.'

(*Purg.*, xxxi. 61.)

Finally, the traditional characteristics of the cat and the mouse are alluded to in—

'Tra male gatte era venuto 'l sorco.'

(*Inf.*, xxii. 58.)

Dante's reference to the cold nature of Saturn—

'Nell'ora che non può 'l calor diurno
Intiepidar più 'l freddo della Luna,
Vinto da Terra, e talor da Saturno'

(*Purg.*, xix. 1-3);

while probably more directly connected with that of Brunetto Latini—

'Quar Saturnus, qui est le soverains sor touz, est cruex et felons et de froide nature'

(*Trésor*, p. 128),

nevertheless represents a widespread belief of the day, as is proved by the following passages from other writers:—

'Frigida Saturni sese quo stella receptet.'

(Vergil, *Georg.*, i. 336.)

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finito l'inverno, e fuggissi dal padrone cantando: "Domine, più non ti curo, chè uscito son dal verno"; ma presto se ne pentì, perchè il freddo ricominciò, e così conobbe che quel po' di bonaccia non era la primavera.'

'Stella Jovis temeratae naturae est. Media enim fertur inter frigidicam Saturni et aestuosam Marti'
(Claudius Ptolemaeus, as cited by Magistretti);

and we even find Saturn alluded to as *ealdsig tungol* in the Anglo-Saxon *Metra*, xxiv.[1]

There are a number of very interesting verbal resemblances between Dante and other mediæval writers, by whom he could not have been in any way influenced. If these resemblances are not mere coincidences, they can be due only to the widespread use of conventional figures and metaphors. Perhaps the most interesting of these coincidences is the use of the sea by Dante to represent the *Divina Commedia* in the *Paradiso*, II., 1 and ff. We find exactly the same figure used by Otfrid—

'Nu wíll ih thes gifílzan, then segal nìtharlazan,
Thaz in thes stádes feste min ruader nu giréste.'[2]
(*Evangelienbuch*, xxv. 5-6.)

So, too, the passage describing the bird waiting for the coming of the dawn:—

'E con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,
Fiso guardando, pur che l'alba nasca'
(*Par.*, xxiii. 8-9)

[1] See Lüning, *Die Natur in der Altgermanischen und Mittelhochdeutschen Epik*, p. 66.

[2] In *Inf.*, xxvii. 81, we find the words *calar le vele* used to express the end of life (see also Vergil, *Georg.*, iv. 116-117).

finds a parallel in Middle-High-German poetry—

'. . . So vroeut sich mîn gemüete, sam diu kleinen vogellîn
So sie sehent den morgenschîn.'
(*Ms.* ii. 102*b*.)

'Ih warte der vrouwen mîn, reht alse des tags die kleinen vôgellîn.'
(*HMS.* i. 21*a*.)

One of the most beautiful lines in the *Divina Commedia*—

'Par tremolando mattutina stella'
(*Purg.*, xii. 90)

suggests similar passages from a variety of sources; thus in the *Vulgate* we find the words—

'Ego sum radix et genus David, stella splendida et matutina'
(*Apocalypsis*, xxii. 16);

and in the Middle-High-German lines below, Karl's eyes are said to shine like the morning-star—

'Ia lûhten sîn ougen sam ther morgensterre.'[2]
(*Rolandslied*, 686-687.)

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[1] See Lüning, *l. c.*, p. 39; cf. also—
'Non dormatz plus, qu'eu aug chantar l'auzel
Que vai queren lo jorn per lo boscatge.'
(*Guirautz de Borneill*, Mahn, i. p. 191.)

[2] See Lüning, *l. c.*, p. 17. So, too, does the Scotch poet,

I have thus discussed (at too great length, perhaps) what I have called the Conventional Treatment of Nature in the *Divina Commedia.* My object, however, has not been to deny Dante's claim to be considered a close observer and a genuine lover of Nature; for this I believe to be true of him in an eminent degree, and I fully concur in the opinions of Burckhardt and Humboldt,[1] who consider him to be the first poet to show the modern appreciation of the world in which we live. The object of the present chapter has been merely to clear the way for a more intelligent discussion of Nature in the *Divina Commedia.*

William Dunbar, sing of the *goldyn candill matutyne* (see Veitch, *l. c.*, vol. i. p. 226). Tasso also makes a beautiful use of this figure in the well-known passage in the *Gerus. Liber.*, xv. 60.

[1] Burckhardt, *Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, ii. p. 17; Humboldt, *Cosmos*, ii. p. 418 (Bohn's Edition).

CHAPTER III

THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF NATURE AS SEEN IN THE *INFERNO*, THE *PURGATORIO*, AND THE *PARADISO*.

As might naturally be expected, the features of Nature which are seen in the *Divina Commedia* are different in the three great divisions of the poem. The picture that unrolls itself before our eyes in Hell and Purgatory is painted with great clearness, exactness, and detail. The same power which enables the poet to produce such striking pictures of human life and character manifests itself likewise in the realm of animate and inanimate Nature.

In his description of the Infernal world Dante differs widely from Milton, with whom it is natural to compare him, in the minuteness of his details. Whereas Milton's Hell is vague, vast, grand, and sublime, Dante follows

the characteristics of the Middle Ages in the almost geometrical accuracy of his descriptions. Thus the stream that strikes athwart the sandy plain in the sixth circle is flanked by dikes such as the Flemish build, between Wissant and Bruges, to keep out the sea, only not so large.[1] In some instances the exact measurements are given; for instance, the ninth of the Malebolge is twenty-two miles in circumference;[2] and we are told later that the first Terrace of Purgatory is so narrow that from the edge of the precipice to the perpendicular wall of the mountain, it measures only three times the length of the human body.[3]

There is a striking difference between the landscapes (as well as the souls that inhabit

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[1] 'Quale i Fiamminghi tra Guzzante e Bruggia
Temendo 'l fiotto, che invêr lor s'avventa,
Fanno lo schermo, perchè 'l mar si fuggia.
. . . . . .
A tale imagine eran fatti quelli,
Tuttoche nè sì alti, nè sì grossi.' (*Inf.*, xv. 4-11.)

[2] 'Pensa, se tu annoverar le credi,
Che miglia ventiduo la valle volge.' (*Ibid.* xxix. 8-9.)
The tenth *bolgia* is eleven miles long and a half mile wide (xxx. 86-87).

[3] 'Dalla sua sponda, ove confina il vano,
A' piè dell 'alta ripa che pur sale,
Misurebbe in tre volte un corpo umano.'
(*Purg.*, x. 22-24.)

them) of Hell and Purgatory. Coleridge has noted the way in which Shakespeare seems to give the keynote of tragedy or comedy in the first scene of his plays. In similar manner the shudder that strikes the soul while passing under the dread inscription that marks the gate of Hell—

'Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate'[1]—

is prophetic of the horror and suffering that are to follow. So, too, the opening scene of the *Purgatorio* prepares the mind for all the loveliness, sweetness, and joy with which the terraces and summit of the mount of purgation are filled.

The scenery of the *Inferno* is perhaps more realistic than that of the *Purgatorio*; there is a greater variety of landscapes and a greater wealth of description. In general shape it is an immense hollow cone, whose base touches the surface of the terrestrial globe, and whose apex reaches to the centre of earth (and hence of the universe). The slopes of this immense, funnel-shaped cavity are rough, and broken by yawning chasms and tremendous precipices. These are all cut by nine concen-

[1] *Inf.*, iii. 9.

tric, constantly narrowing circles or terraces, which are miles in diameter, and contain, each one, certain definite landscapes. To descend from one to another of these circles, the poet must clamber down over steep and rocky paths, slide over the loose stones of land-slides, or be let down by supernatural means the sheer sides of perpendicular walls.[1]

The poet has here full opportunity of giving definite descriptions, and he probably had in mind many actual scenes, which he himself had observed, while writing his poem.[2]

Purgatory is just as rocky and mountainous as Hell, and we have here also all the fatigue and difficulty of mountain climbing.[3] And yet

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[1] If we could conceive the crater of Vesuvius expanded enormously so that its centre would coincide with that of the earth, we should have a clear idea of the general shape of Dante's Hell.

[2] It is not at all improbable that many of the details of rocky scenery in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* were taken from the personal experience of Dante in his travel along the Riviera, so full of almost impassable mountains, to which he refers in the following lines :—

'Tra Lerici e Turbìa, la più diserta,
La più ruinata via è una scala,
Verso di quella, agevole ed aperta.'
(*Purg.*, iii. 49-51).

[3] Although we have an implication that Purgatory is equal in size to Hell (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 124-126), yet in reality the latter is far more vast than the former. Cf. the size of the Infernal

here and there are beautiful scenes, and about and above all there is an air of openness, of freedom, of light that makes it infinitely more beautiful than the Inferno. In the latter all is tinged by an atmosphere of darkness and horror; all the hideous phases of Nature are there; the rain that falls is not the cool, refreshing summer shower, but is heavy, cold, and disagreeable, rotting all it falls upon. The wind is not the soft breeze of spring, but the whirlwind and hurricane. The streams are not clear and sweet, but dark, filthy, and muddy, or hideously red like blood. No green things grow in these landscapes; the trees are gnarled and rough, the bushes are thorns and briars. Foul monsters dwell here, poisonous worms and insects and snakes; while from time to time the poets are almost overcome by a stench intolerable, disgusting, and the air is rent with lamentations, curses, and shrieks of despair.

Purgatory, on the other hand, while for the most part bare and grey and forbidding in its

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Circles (*Inf.*, xv. 13-15; xxix. 9; xxx. 86) with that of the terraces of Purgatory (*Purg.*, x. 24). The Earthly Paradise, however, gives the impression of great size, and may be considered as making up for the narrowness of the terraces.

aspect, produces upon us the impression of Nature in her loveliest aspect. This is due not only to the few exquisite landscapes that vary the monotony of the cold, grey rocks, but also to its location in the midst of the great Southern Ocean, to the beauty of the sky, to its favourable atmospheric conditions, and to the eternal spring that reigns here. As the wanderers mount from terrace to terrace, they meet from time to time angels with wings of gold, garments of white and faces of flame, or the souls of repentant sinners, bearing their sufferings with meekness and patience, and singing the songs of the redeemed.

MAY 25

Among the numerous touches of Nature in Hell and Purgatory, there are several famous scenes which will occur instantly to the mind of the reader of the *Divina Commedia*. At the very threshold of the Infernal regions—as if to soften the first great impression of horror, or, perhaps, to make the contrast stronger—is the picture of the Castle of Poets, where the great spirits of antiquity dwell in a sort of penumbral light, with no other punishment than to live always in desire which cannot be satisfied. There is a singular melancholy charm about this scene—the noble castle, surrounded by

lofty sevenfold walls, within which lies a meadow of green grass.[1] It is like a cool oasis in the terrible scorched desert of Hell.

Other vivid scenes are the wide, desolate campagna, within the walls of the city of Dis, covered with tombs;[2] the ten concentric sub-circles of Malebolge, with a variety of scenery of their own;[3] the gruesome wood of suicides, with its gnarled and twisted trees, its thorny bushes, and the hideous Harpies, perched on the branches;[4] and the fiery plain, where Dante meets Brunetto Latini, with burning sand, falling flakes of flame, and the blood-red river, running with diked borders athwart it.[5] At the very bottom of the vast abyss lies the lake of ice, hard as adamant, showing not a crack, even on the edge, swept by an icy wind, which freezes even the tears in the eyes of the wretched sinners who are punished there.[6] The descrip-

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[1] 'Venimmo al piè d'un nobile castello,
Sette volte cerchiato d'alte mura,
Difeso intorno da un bel fiumicello.
Questo passammo come terra dura:
Per sette porte entrai con questi savi;
Giugnemmo in prato di fresca verdura.'
(*Inf.*, iv. 106-111.)

[2] *Inf.*, ix. 110 ff.
[3] *Inf.*, xviii. 1 ff.
[4] *Ibid.* xiii. 4 ff.
[5] *Ibid.* xiv. 8 ff.
[6] *Inf.*, xxxii. 22 ff.

tion of these scenes produces an intensely realistic impression, which is heightened as we see the poet himself moving about among them, peering into the faces of the spirits, entering into conversation with them, feeling his heart touched in turn by pity,[1] contempt,[2] wrath or indignation.[3]

As I have already said, there are not so many definite landscapes in Purgatory; indeed, there are only three that are described in much detail; but these three are among the most beautiful in all literature. No poet has ever produced a more lovely picture than the scene which bursts upon the eyes of the wanderers, as, issuing forth from the horrors of Hell, they see stretching out before them the waters of the great Southern Ocean, trembling beneath the light of the morning star. Above them bends a cloudless sky, where the four stars of the Southern Cross shine with almost solar brilliancy; a soft wind is blowing in from the

[1] 'Pietà mi vinse, e fui quasi smarrito' (*Inf.*, v. 72).
'Certo i' piangea, poggiato ad un de' rocchi.'
(*Ibid.* xx. 25.)

[2] 'Ed io a lui: Con piangere e con lutto
Spirito maledetto, ti rimani' (*Ibid.* viii. 37-38).

[3] 'Ahi, Pisa, vituperio delle genti,' etc.
(*Ibid.* xxxiii. 79 ff.)

sea, whose waves plash with gentle murmur on the shore, bending the pliant reeds which alone grow there.[1]

Then there is that other scene—the Valley of the Princes, hollowed out of the perpendicular mountain side, with grassy lawns variegated with many-coloured flowers, with whose fragrance the air is heavy. It is the melancholy hour of twilight, when the heart of the pilgrim turns back with love to the dear ones at home, as he hears the vesper chimes from some distant church. The darkness deepens; there are heard the voices of saintly souls singing the

> 'Old Latin hymns of peace and love,
> And benediction of the Holy Ghost.'

And then there comes the rush of green-winged angels, driving back the serpent with their flaming swords.[2]

But by far the longest description, and in some respects the most beautiful passage in the *Divina Commedia*, is that which describes the Earthly Paradise, which crowns the summit of Purgatory. Words fail to render the charm produced upon the reader by that divine forest, the limpid stream bending the green grass that

[1] *Purg.*, i. 13 ff.

[2] *Purg.*, viii. 1 ff.

grows on its borders, the leaves murmuring in the gentle breeze, the song of birds, the tender light of morning, the beautiful lady moving along the river-bank, plucking the flowers and weaving them into garlands.[1]

In the foregoing discussion of general landscapes in the *Divina Commedia*, I have said nothing of the *Paradiso*; the reason is simple. Here there are no landscapes in the strict sense of the term. The effects produced are mostly those of light and sweet sounds. The various heavens are vaguely described; scarcely a picture remains fixed in the memory of the reader. Even the souls that inhabit these spheres are dimly seen, like the reflection from shallow water or a pearl on a white forehead. Frequently they have no shape at all, but are lights, flashes, and splendours. The whole *Paradiso* produces the effect rather of music than of painting or sculpture.[2]

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[1] *Purg.*, xxviii. 1 ff. It is interesting to compare with this passage Milton's description of Paradise; longer, more detailed, more full of modern feeling for Nature, yet undoubtedly due to some extent to Dante's picture of the Earthly Paradise (*Par. Lost*, iv. 131 ff.).

[2] The light effects of the *Paradiso* will be treated elsewhere. Here a word or two may not be out of place concerning the sounds that are heard in the *Divina Commedia*, and especially

in Paradise, where the harmony of the celestial spheres forms a sort of background to all kinds of sweet music—the song of birds, the sound of harp, and cithern, and organ, mingled with singing voices (*soave e benigno*), all infinitely sweeter than earthly music, and utterly beyond the poet's power to describe. Some of the descriptions are very beautiful; as, for example, the following passages:—

'E come in fiamma favilla si vede,
E come in voce voce si discerne,
Quando una è ferma, e l'altra va e riede.'
(*Par.*, viii. 16-18.)

'Indi, come orologio, che ne chiami
Nell' ora che la sposa di Dio surge
A mattinar lo sposo perchè l' ami.
Che l'una parte l'altra tira ed urge,
Tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota,
Che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge;
Così vid' io la gloriosa ruota
Muoversi, e render voce a voce in tempra
Ed in dolcezza, ch' esser non può nota,
Se non colà, dove 'l gioir s'insempra.'
(*Par.*, x. 139-148.)

CHAPTER IV

ITALY IN THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

THERE are some striking scenes in the *Divina Commedia*, the features of which are drawn from foreign landscapes, and which would seem to be due to the personal observation of the poet himself. Such are the references to the tomb-strewn plain near Arles in Provence,[1] and the dikes stretching along the Flemish coast from Bruges to Wissant.[2]

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[1] 'Sì com' ad Arli ove 'l Rodano stagna

. . . . .

Fanno i sepolchri tutto 'l loco varo.'

(*Inf.*, ix. 112-115.)

[2] 'Quale i Fiamminghi tra Guzzante e Bruggia

. . . . . .

Fanno lo schermo, perchè 'l mar si fuggia.'

(*Inf.*, xv. 4-6.)

It is by no means improbable that Dante was acquainted with these scenes. There is a passage in the *Divina Commedia* (*Par.*, x. 136-138) which has been taken as evidence that he had spent some time in study at the University of Paris, and doubtful arguments have been made for a similar visit to Oxford. Cf. Gladstone in the *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 31.

But with very few exceptions[1] it is Italy which furnishes the material by means of which Dante describes the scenery of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

A great many cities of Italy claim that the Divine poet visited them, before or after his exile, and the number of castles, monasteries, and private houses where he is said to have dwelt is large. Many of these claims have, of course, no basis of truth or even probability. Yet we have his own word that he travelled over a large portion of Italy;[2] and the list of places we know he visited is a long one, including the cities of Bologna, Siena, Arezzo, Forlì, Verona, Padua, Venice, Ravenna.[3]

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[1] Besides the classical references to Ægina, Lemnos, Parnassus, Mount Ida, etc., there are allusions to the frozen Danube and Don, the high mountain of Tabernicch, and the *arena arida e spessa* of Libya. These, however, are all purely conventional, or geographical.

[2] 'Poichè fu piacere de' cittadini della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gettarmi fuori del suo dolcissimo seno, . . . per le parti quasi tutte, alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato' (*Convito*, i. 3).

[3] It will be noted in the above list that they are all in Northern Italy. The references he makes to Naples and the country south of it are few and invariably historical, geographical, or mythological. There is not a single passage which shows any personal knowledge on his part.

Italy is the only country which can vie with Greece in the love and admiration with which its natural beauty has inspired mankind. Goethe has called it the home of his intellect, and has reproduced its charm in one of the most beautiful lyrics of literature ;[1] while Byron and Landor and Shelley and Browning felt for it a love which ended only with life.[2]

It would seem indeed strange if Dante,whose soul was open to all that was good and beautiful and true, had not likewise been affected by the natural beauty in the midst of which he lived. We know he loved his native land ; for him she is the 'dolce terra Latina,'[3] 'Italia bella,'[4] and the 'garden of the Roman Empire.'[5] Patriotism, deep, burning, all-pervading, increased this love. He was proud of the ancient glory of his fatherland and ashamed of her present degradation. On the one hand his heart goes back to the good old days of Roman simplicity and virtue;[6]

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[1] Mignon's song in *Wilhelm Meister.*

[2] The words of Browning are well known, 'Open my heart, and you will find graven inside of it "Italy."'

[3] *Inf.*, xxvii. 26, 27. [4] *Ibid.* xx. 61.

[5] *Purg.*, vi. 105.

[6] 'E le Romane antiche per lor bere
Contente furon d'acqua.'
(*Purg.*, xxii. 145, 146.)

on the other he pours forth fiery denunciations on the shamelessness of his contemporaries,[1] the avarice of the Church,[2] and the bitter civil strifes that filled with blood the streets of almost every city.[3] This very indignation is an evidence of the depth of his love for his native land.[4]

Yet we must confess that the direct evidence in the *Divina Commedia* of an appreciation of the natural beauty of Italy, in any way comparable with that shown by modern writers, is very small.

Travellers have gone into ecstasy over the loveliness of the scenery along the Riviera. The very name of some of the places mentioned by Dante calls up visions of beauty to those who have been in these parts—the river Macra, the mountains of Carrara, Lerici, Sestri, and Chiavari. Yet only a single short passage can be construed as indicating any similar feeling on the part of the poet. In speaking of the

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[1] 'Alle sfacciate donne fiorentine' (*Purg.*, xxiii. 101).

[2] 'Che la vostra avarizia il mondo attrista' (*Inf.*, xix. 104).

[3] *Inf.*, xxiv. 143 ff.

[4] In the *Canzoniere* (*Moore*, p. 168), Dante, in a noble canzone, apostrophises, with mingled indignation and love, his native land.

celebrated soothsayer Aruns, he tells us that he dwelt in a cave among the marble rocks of the mountains of Luni, with an unbroken view over sea and sky.[1] It may have been that Dante himself had stood on these mountains and gazed over the landscape below, which Shelley loved so deeply, and which witnessed his tragic end.

So, too, of all the beauty that hovers about Venice, floating on the bosom of the Adriatic, not a trace can be found in the *Divina Commedia.* The single reference made to the city alludes to the activity, and the din and rattle of those engaged in repairing vessels in the Arsenal.[2]

Again, the only emotions called up by Florence to the heart of Dante are those of

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[1] 'Onde a guardar le stelle
E 'l mar non gli era la veduta tronca.'
(*Inf.*, xx. 50-51.)

[2] 'Quale nell'Arzanà de' Viniziani
Bolle l' inverno la tenace pece
A rimpalmar li legni lor non sani,
Chè navicar non ponno, e 'n quella vece
Chi fa suo legno nuovo, e chi ristoppa
Le coste a quel, che più viaggi fece;
Chi ribatte da proda, e chi da poppa;
Altri fa remi, ed altri volge sarte;
Chi terzeruolo ed artimon rintoppa.'
(*Inf.*, xxi. 7-15.)

homesickness,[1] of wrath and bitterness.[2] The nearest approach to anything like appreciation of the beauty of his native city is found in the passages where he speaks of the 'beautiful sheepfold where he slept as a lamb,'[3] and of the 'great city on the banks of the beautiful river of Arno.'[4]

In spite of the above facts, however, I am persuaded that Dante did appreciate the beauty of his native land. Though he says but little of those landscapes which are especially praised in modern times, there are some passages which might have been written by a modern poet. In the tenth of the Evil Pits of Hell, Master Adam da Brescia is punished for the sin of counterfeiting. Tormented with thirst, longing to wet his lips with a little water, his memory recalls to him the fresh streams so familiar to him in

[1] In three passages he betrays his longing for the home of his youth. The most famous, of course, is the twilight scene in the Valley of Princes (*Purg.*, viii. 1 ff.). Quaintly enough, he compares the reflected ray of light to a *peregrin che tornar vuole* (*Par.*, i. 51); and in the beautiful passage in *Purg.*, xxvii. 109 ff., he speaks of—

'Gli splendori antelucani
Che tanto ai peregrin surgon più grati,
Quanto tornando, albergan men lontani.'

Cf. also *Convito*, i. 3—'Nel quale, con buona pace di quella, desidero con tutto il cuore di riposare l'animo stanco.'

[2] *Inf.*, xxvi. 1. [3] *Par.*, xxv. 5. [4] *Inf.*, xxiii. 95.

the mortal life; and he sees in imagination how, 'down from the green hills of the Casentino, the little streams descend to the Arno, making their channels cool and soft.'[1] In the description of the Earthly Paradise reference is made to the musical murmur of the great pine forest of Chiassi,[2] and the distant roar of the waterfall of Montone is well rendered in the onomatopoetic line—

'Rimbomba là sovra San Benedetto.'

Granting that these references are few and meagre, yet the explanation of Dante's comparative silence concerning the beauty of Italian landscapes is to be sought, not entirely in any lack of feeling on his part, but partly, at least, in the spirit of the times. We cannot expect to find detailed descriptions of landscapes in the *Divina Commedia* when Cimabue and Giotto absolutely ignore them.[4]

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[1] 'Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli
Del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,
Facendo i lor canali e freddi e molli,
Sempre mi stanno innanzi, e non indarno.'
(*Inf.*, xxx. 64-67.)

[2] 'Tal, qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
Per la pineta in sul lito di Chiassi.'
(*Purg.*, xxviii. 19-20.)

[3] *Inf.*, xvi. 100.

[4] Humboldt speaks of the utter silence of the minnesingers

And yet, leaving aside the purely æsthetic treatment of Italy in the *Divina Commedia*, we find a large number of definite references and accurate descriptions of certain physical features of the country. Often these references are merely geographical or historical; often the text for political disquisitions. Yet, if we gather them together and arrange them in order, we shall find that the poet gives a fairly complete general view of North Italy, as well as many details. In one passage he seems to take us up to a great height and to give us a bird's-eye view, not only of Italy, but the distant shores of Africa, and the whole extent of the Mediterranean.[1]

In other passages we see the great backbone of the Apennines,[2] rising between the Mediterranean and Adriatic,[3] with Sicily cut off at the end;[4] the plains of Lombardy[5] and Tus-

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concerning 'die herrliche Natur Italiens.' Freidank, who visited Rome, only remarks that grass grew in the palaces of those who once ruled there. (See Biese, *Die Entwickelung des Naturgefühls*, p. 117.)

[1] *Par.*, ix. 82 ff.

[2] 'Lo dosso d'Italia' (*Purg.*, xxx. 86). [3] *Par.*, xxi. 106.

[4] 'L' alpestro monte, ond' è tronco Peloro' (*Purg.*, xiv. 32).

[5] 'Lo dolce piano
Che da Vercello a Marcabò dichina.'
(*Inf.*, xxviii. 74-75.)

cany,[1] the lake of Garda,[2] the Arno, the Po, the Adige.

The modern traveller sees Italy different from what it was in Dante's day. Not to speak of the natural changes made in the general aspect of the country, by the diminution of woodland and uncultivated fields, by the introduction of new articles of produce, and the rise and growth of cities, there are certain definite changes that we know of. Florence was without a large number of that remarkable group of buildings, which excites the admiration of the world to-day; the province of Valdichiana, between Arezzo and Perugia, which Dante alludes to as infected by disease,[3] has been made by means of modern hydraulic science one of the most beautiful and fertile parts of Tuscany; and the Casentino is said to be by no means so beautiful to-day as Dante describes it. On the other hand, many descriptions made by him are as true at the present time as when he wrote.

In a few words he touches off the characteristic features of the different provinces:

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[1] 'Per mezzo Toscana si spazia
Un fiumicel' (*Purg.*, xiv. 16-17).

[2] *Inf.*, xx. 61 ff.

[3] *Inf.*, xxix. 47.

Sicily is an island of fire;[1] Maremma and Sardinia are fever-stricken and desolate;[2] the territory between the river Cecina and the city of Corneto is covered with dense woods and thickets;[3] and there are allusions to the valley of the Arno, and the plains of Lombardy, watered by the Po and the Adige; while the exact location of Romagna is given in the single line—

'Tra 'l Po e 'l monte e la marina e 'l Reno.'[4]

In similar manner, the peculiar appearance location, and characteristics of towns and cities are given; the marshes about Mantua,[5] the variable temperature of Perugia due to the hills which surround it,[6] the mountains which hide from each other Pisa and Lucca,[7] Ravenna with its marshes and forests,[8] the dikes of the river Brenta near Padua,[9] and the mountains in the neighbourhood of Urbino, Modena, and Genoa.[10] Assisi is beautifully described in the

[1] *Par.*, xix. 131.
[2] *Inf.*, xxix. 48.
[3] 'Non han sì aspri sterpi, nè sì folti
Quelle fiere selvagge, che in odio hanno,
Tra Cecina e Corneto, i luoghi colti.'
(*Inf.*, xiii. 7-9.)
[4] *Purg.*, xiv. 92.
[5] *Inf.*, xx. 79-81.
[6] *Par.*, xi. 45-46.
[7] *Inf.*, xxxiii. 29-30.
[8] *Purg.*, xxviii. 20.
[9] *Inf.*, xv. 7.
[10] *Inf.*, xxvii. 29; *Purg.*, iv. 25-26.

introductory lines to the eulogy of S. Francis given by S. Thomas Aquinas.[1] In all these passages we are struck by the poet's topographical accuracy. Just as in those cases where he describes natural phenomena he almost invariably gives the scientific explanation of them, so here he shows more than ordinary skill in selecting the characteristic natural features of the scene he describes. A striking example of this is found in the passage where Francesca da Rimini describes the location of Ravenna, as being situated on the seashore, where the Po with its tributaries descends to find peace;[2] and also in the description of the course of the Arno, in which the poet gives vent to his indignation at the corruption of his countrymen. He takes us up to the summit of Mount Falterona, where the Arno has its source,

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[1] *Par.*, xi. 43-48. Covino says of this passage: 'Tali luoghi furon con impareggiabile verità e precisione descritti nel Paradiso' (*Descrizione Geog. dell' Italia*, p. 27).

[2] *Inf.*, v. 97-99. M. Ampère, who made a pilgrimage to Italy with the *Divina Commedia* as a guide, cries out again and again at this infallibility of touch. Thus of the above passage he speaks of 'la justesse du trait rapide par lequel Dante caractérise avec son bonheur ordinaire la nature des lieux'; and says further, 'Il suffit de jeter les yeux sur une carte pour reconnaître l'exactitude topographique de cette dernière expression' (*La Grèce, Rome et Dante*, p. 344).

and gives us the same bird's-eye view over the valley below which he himself must often have had.[1] This passage is an excellent example of the way in which Dante often weaves politics and personal feeling into his descriptions of Italy. He names each city near which the Arno flows, and takes the occasion to scourge the inhabitants thereof for their avarice, slyness, or quarrelsome disposition.[2]

The same exactness and more minuteness are shown in the detailed description of the location of Mantua, in the course of which we are told how the streams that rise among the Alps form the *Lago di Garda*; how the river Mincio flows from the lake, and after a short course broadens over flat meadows and forms a marsh, in the midst of which the city was built.[3]

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[1] *Purg.*, xiv. 16-18 and 31-54. Cf. 'Veramente io vidi lo luogo nelle coste d'un monte in Toscana, che si chiama Falterona.' (*Convito*, iv. 11.)

[2] Thus he calls the Aretines 'snarling curs' (botoli ringhiosi), and says the river turns from them in disgust—

'E da lor disdegnosa torce il muso.'

(*Purg.*, xiv. 48.)

It is interesting to compare with these lines the brief description of the course of the Arno in the *Encyc. Brit.*, vol. xiii. p. 438: 'The Arno, which has its source in the Monte Falterona, . . . flows at first nearly south, till in the neighbourhood of Arezzo it turns abruptly to the north-west.'

[3] *Inf.*, xx. 61-81. Cf. also Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, xliii. 3.

One of the striking features of the physical geography of Italy are the mountains, which not only form a barrier between it and the rest of the world, but divide it into two parts. In another chapter will be discussed the numerous details of mountain scenery found in the *Divina Commedia.* Here we need only to call attention to the mountains which are mentioned by name, —not only the long chains of the Alps and Apennines, but the smaller and less known ranges and single mountains. Thus we find Monte Cassino,[1] the Monti di Luni[2] (near Carrara), Monte Alvernia[3] (where S. Francis of Assisi received the stigmata), Monte Falterona[4] (near Florence), Focara on the Adriatic coast[5] (a very high mountain, whence terrible winds arise, fatal to mariners), Chiarentana, near Padua[6] (whose melting snows often cause the river Brenta to overflow), and Catria, near Urbino, where Dante is said to have visited the monastery of S. Croce di Fonte Avellana.[7]

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[1] *Par.*, xxii. 37.
[2] *Inf.*, xx. 47.
[3] *Par.*, xi. 106.
[4] *Purg.*, xiv. 17.
[5] *Inf.*, xxviii. 89.
[6] *Inf.*, xv. 9. The identity of the mountain in this passage is doubtful however.
[7] *Par.*, xxi. 106-111.

All these the poet had probably seen himself.[1]

A word or two may not be out of place here concerning the architectural features of the landscapes in the *Divina Commedia.* Dante gives many details of the architecture of Italy in his own days. We find allusions to the leaning tower of Bologna,[2] the fortress of Peschiera,[3] the baptistry of Florence,[4] and the circular walls, crowned with towers, of Montereggione,[5] while the number of bridges, towers, churches, and castles referred to is large. A curious thing about the poet's use of Italy, however, is the omission of any reference to the old ruins, which are so marked a feature of the country. A modern poet is filled with melancholy thoughts at the sight of these mute reminders of the vanity of human glory. Although many of the monuments of ancient Rome have only been uncovered in recent times, Dante must have been acquainted with the Colosseum and the aqueducts that stretch across the Campagna. Yet of these things we

[1] Quite otherwise is it with the references to Ætna and Mount Aventine, which are merely rhetorical.

[2] *Inf.*, xxxi. 136. [3] *Inf.*, xx. 70.

[4] 'Mio bel San Giovanni' (*Inf.*, xix. 17).

[5] *Inf.*, xxxi. 40-41.

find scarcely a word. It is true that the Malebolge are supposed to have been suggested by the amphitheatre at Verona, and we have a definite reference to the Mole of Adrian at Rome. But it was not as a ruin he considered the latter, but rather as a mediæval fortress, referring to it as the Castle of Sant' Angelo.[1] Dante, however, only followed his age in this apparent lack of appreciation of the grandiose character of those ruins, which form one of the chief attractions for the modern traveller.[2]

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[1] *Inf.*, xviii. 32.

[2] Cf., however, *Convito*, iv. 5: 'E certo sono di ferma opinione, che le pietre che nelle mura sue stanno siano degne di riverenzia; e 'l suolo dov' ella siede sia degno oltre quello che per gli uomini è predicato e provato.' Burckhardt says these words are to be understood as those of the historian and patriot, and goes on to say: 'Dante geht meist achtlos oder verachtend an den Denkmälern des Alterthums vorüber: die alten Statuen erscheinen ihm wie Götzenbilder' (i. p. 201).

CHAPTER V

THE PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

DANTE seems to have shared the curiosity, which men of all times have had, to know how the world looks when seen from a great distance above. The impulse, which is so strong in our own day, to seek some means of navigating the air, has its prototype in Daedalus, and the unfortunate Icarus is none other than a classical Darius Green.[1] Not only does Ovid, in the stories of *Phaëthon* and *Perseus*, give us bird's-eye views of earth,[2] but Ariosto[3] and Milton[4] do the same; and scientists, like Flammarion, and pseudo-scientists, like Jules Verne,

[1] It is interesting to note that Dante has given a perfect picture of Darius Green:—

'Ver è ch'io dissi a lui, parlando a giuoco,
Io mi saprei levar per l'aere a volo:
E quei, ch'avea vaghezza e senno poco,
Volle, ch'io gli mostrassi l'arte' (*Inf.*, xxix. 112-115).

[2] See p. 31. [3] *Orlando Furioso*, xxxiii. 96 ff.

[4] *Par. Lost*, iii. 722 ff.; v. 257-261.

indulge this inborn fancy to fly in imagination through the air.

There are two places where Dante gives us a view of the earth in *alto relievo*, with all its inequalities, its hills and valleys, rivers and seas, revolving beneath him as he is caught up into the heaven of fixed stars. 'I saw this globe,' he says, 'such that I smiled at its vile appearance;'[1] and again, 'This little threshing-floor, which makes us so fierce, appeared to me in its entirety from mountain to sea;'[2] from another place he saw at one view the Strait of Gibraltar, Cadiz, and the opposite shore of Phœnicia.[3]

The most important physical features of

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[1] *Par.*, xxii. 134, 135. There is a striking parallel to this passage in Plato's *Phædo*, quoted by Biese (p. 45), where Socrates says: 'Wenn jemand zur Grenze der Luft gelangte oder Flügel bekäme und hinauf flöge . . . so würde er den wahren Himmel, das wahre Licht und die wahre Erde erkennen; verächtlich würde er herabsehen auf die verwitterte, zerklüftete und anstaunen die wunderbare Herrlichkeit der himmlischen.'

[2] 'L'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci

. . . . .

Tutta m'apparve da' colli alle foci.'

(*Par.*, xxii. 151-153.)

[3] 'Sì ch'io vedea di là da Gade il varco
Folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito
Nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco.'

(*Ibid.*, xxvii. 82-84.)

Nature herself are the mountains and the sea; hence we are not surprised to find in the *Divina Commedia* more references to these features of the earth's surface than to anything else. The most striking characteristic of the physical geography of Italy is the great backbone of the Apennines. Dante, every day of his life in Florence, could have looked upon the Tuscan chain of these mountains, and the Pisan hills in the west; while in later life his travels to the Riviera, Verona, and Venice must have made him somewhat acquainted with the vast wall of the Swiss Alps which divide Italy from Germany.[1]

It is altogether probable that Dante shared the prejudice of the Middle Ages in regard to the gloomy and forbidding nature of mountain scenery. The question of the development of a love for mountains, which is so remarkable a feature of modern times, is exceedingly interesting. The ancients had a horror of them, except as a pleasing background in the distance, which lent 'enchantment to the view.'

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[1] 'Appiè dell' Alpi, che serran Lamagna' (*Inf.*, xx. 62). Dante looks on all mountains as barriers or walls. Cf.—

'Al monte,
Per che i Pisan veder Lucca non ponno' (*Ibid.*, xxxiii. 30).

With the Romans all pleasant and lovely landscapes must be flat; mountains were to them *latebris horrenda ferarum*;[1] and even as far down as the last of the eighteenth century men in general had a feeling of fear and awe in the presence of mountain scenery. Mediæval travellers give expression to the difficulties encountered in crossing the Alps; and, in the seventeenth century, Sebastian Münster 'felt a shudder in his very bones' while descending the Gemmi Pass.[2] Rousseau, whose influence was so great in other directions, was one of the first to reveal the 'mountain glory' to the world. Since his day the love and passion have grown, and to-day poetry and art are full of the beauty and grandeur of snow-clad peaks, shining glaciers, and the quiet and calm of Alpine valleys.[3]

It is not always wise to argue, from the absence of definite statement, the absence of emotion; yet we may assume that Dante felt none of the thrill of rapture which modern poets experience among the mountains. All

[1] Ovid, *Met.* i. 216.

[2] See Friedländer, *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms*, vol. ii. pp. 220 ff.

[3] Cf. for discussion of the feeling for mountains, Friedländer, *ibid.*, and Humboldt, *Cosmos*, ii. p. 391.

the phases we see of them in the *Divina Commedia* are forbidding, rough, lonely, grim.[1] The references given are almost invariably details of rocks, precipices, and yawning chasms. There is only one distant view of a lofty mountain, rising 'brown in the distance'[2] from the waters of the unknown sea over which Ulysses and his companions are sailing. But they have no time to approach it, or to see more details, for a great wind issues from it, whirls the vessel round three times, and plunges it, prow downward, into the sea.[3]

In the *Inferno* the wanderers find themselves shut up in a succession of narrow ravines, deep

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[1] See Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, III. ch. xv. There are a few expressions which seem to form an exception to this statement; the Earthly Paradise is called the *bel cacume* (*Par.*, xvii. 113); and again the mountain, seen by Dante at the beginning of his journey, is called the *bel monte* (*Inf.*, ii. 120), and *il dilettoso monte* (*ibid.*, i. 77). These can hardly be taken, however, as indicating any feeling for mountains on the part of Dante, since they are used symbolically.

[2] Ruskin interprets 'brown' here to mean purple, and says that Byron means the same when he speaks of 'on the mountains brown' (*Modern Painters*, III. ch. xv.).

[3] *Inf.*, xxvi. 137-142. It would be interesting to know what Dante meant by this mountain. Wegele assumes that it was the mountain of Purgatory (*Dante Alighieri's Leben und Werke*, p. 415). On the other hand, Dr. Schück (*Jahrbücher für Phil. und Paed.* 92, pp. 275, 276) believes the poet had in mind the fabulous magnetic mountain of the Middle Ages.

valleys, or clambering down steep slopes, and so wrapped in darkness that only what is immediately before them can be seen. In Purgatory they are out in the open air; yet they cannot see much of the mountain on which they stand, whose walls rise perpendicularly above them or break sheer off to the water's edge below. There is a wide view over sea and sky, but little can be seen ahead or above them as they make their way painfully over the rocky paths.

But all these details bear the impress of being taken from nature. No one who had not spent a long time among the mountains could give such a variety of accurate touches. Everywhere we see landslides,[1] loose stones slipping beneath the feet of the traveller,[2] vast gorges, tremendous precipices,[3] rocky ledges,[4] natural bridges spanning deep chasms.[5]

That Dante had experienced some of the difficulties of mountain climbing we know from the story of his exile;[6] but we should know it

[1] *Inf.*, xii. 1-10.

[2] Di quelle pietre, che spesso moviensi
Sotto i miei piedi per lo nuovo carco' (*Inf.*, xii. 29-30).

[3] *Inf.*, xvii. 118 ff.

[4] 'Su per lo balzo' (*Purg.*, ix. 68). [5] *Inf.*, xviii. 16-18.

[6] Burckhardt says that Dante must have climbed the mountain of Bismantova merely for the sake of the view (vol. ii. p. 17). I think this is more than doubtful.

just as well if we had only the *Divina Commedia* to judge from. We find here a number of details, which show these difficulties. He takes observations of the sun,[1] in order to get his direction, scans the steep rocks ahead to select the best place,[2] tries first the place where he puts his foot to see whether it is safe,[3] clambers on hands and knees,[4] here slides down on his back, and there is pulled up by Vergil,[5] and on reaching the top sits down absolutely exhausted.[6] At times the path is so narrow that the wanderers can only go one at a time,[7] and while scrambling upward they can hardly

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[1] 'Poi fisamente al Sole gli occhi porse' (*Purg.*, xiii. 13).

[2] 'E come quei che adopera ed istima,
Che sempre par che innanzi si proveggia;
Così levando me su vêr la cima
D'un ronchione, avvisava un' altra scheggia.'
(*Inf.*, xxiv. 25-28.)

[3] 'Ma tenta pria s'è tal, ch'ella ti reggia' (*Inf.*, xxiv. 30).

[4] 'E piedi e man voleva'l suol di sotto' (*Purg.*, iv. 33); also, 'Lo piè sanza la man non si spedia' (*Inf.* xxvi. 18).

[5] 'Supin si diede alla pendente roccia' (*Inf.* xxiii. 44, and xix. 124 ff.).

[6] *Purg.*, iv. 43 ff., especially line 52—
'A seder ci ponemmo ivi ambodui.'
Cf. also—
'La lena m'era del polmon sì munta
Quando fui su, ch'i non potea più oltre;
Anzi m'assisi nella prima giunta' (*Inf.*, xxiv. 43-45).
'Prendendo la scala,
Che per artezza i salitor dispaia' (*Purg.*, xxv. 8-9).

squeeze through;[1] at other times this narrow pass added new difficulties by winding in and out 'like a wave that advances and recedes.'[2]

Those who have made the ascent of mountains in Switzerland will remember occasions when, having spent many a weary hour of climbing, they have reached the summit only to find that the mist has crept up out of the valleys and shut out the view. To all such Dante speaks in the following lines:—

'Remember, reader, if among the Alps
Thou wert ever caught by clouds upon the mountain tops,
For which thou saw'st no better than a mole.
How when the damp and heavy mists began
Slowly to grow more thin, the sun's pale sphere,
Dimly and faint appeared as through a veil.'[3]

The rocks which Dante describes are all of the same general character, hard as flint or iron, grey and livid in colour.[4] Although we

[1] 'E d'ogni lato ne stringea lo stremo' (*Purg.*, iv. 32).

[2] 'Pietra fessa
Che si moveva d'una e d'altra parte,
Siccom' onda che fugge e che s'appressa' (*Purg.*, x. 7-9).

[3] *Purg.*, xvii. 1-6.

[4] 'Al piè delle maligne piagge grige' (*Inf.*, vii. 108).
'Col livido color della petraia' (*Purg.*, xiii. 9).
'Tra i duo pareti del duro macigno' (*Ibid.*, xix. 48).
'Tutto di pietra e di color ferrigno' (*Inf.*, xviii. 2).
Mr. Ruskin declares that the rocks of the *Divina Commedia*

see none of the picturesque effects which they often produce,[1] although all is rough, jagged, steep, yet many details of these forbidding aspects are minute and careful, and shapes are often given with geometrical accuracy.

The tremendous precipice, the descent of which the poets make on the back of Gerione, is rendered in a very striking and realistic manner; the throwing of the cord, the appearance of the monster up out of the void, the broad circles and slow motion it makes in the descent, the roar of falling water, the glare of flames, and the shrieks which rise from far below us, all produce a most powerful impression. It almost makes us dizzy as we lean with Dante over the back of Gerione and look down into the tremendous depths below us.[2]

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are entirely drawn from the Apennines, and that their colour is 'peculiarly cold and disagreeable,' and hence distasteful to the Middle Ages, which were characterised by a love for bright and variegated colours' (*Modern Painters*, III. ch. xv.).

[1] Petrarch finds in the mountains of the Riviera, so disagreeable to Dante, 'colles asperitate gratissima et mira fertilitate conspicuos' (Burckhardt, *Cultur der Ren.*, vol. ii. p. 18).

[2] 'Ella sen va notando lenta lenta:
Ruota, e discende, ma non me n'accorgo,
Se non ch'al viso e di sotto mi venta.
I' sentia già dalla man destra il gorgo
Far sotto noi un orribile stroscio;
Per che con gli occhi in giù la testa sporgo.

The description of the valleys in the *Inferno* are in general vague and indistinct. We find such expressions as 'the valley of dolorous abyss,'[1] and the adjectives *misero*, *buia*, *inferna*, *nebulosa*, are frequently used. About the only details given is the size of some of them. It was probably the poet's purpose to leave them vague; he tells us frequently that he himself could see them only dimly, and often the sides and bottoms are shrouded in deep darkness. Of course, the Valley of Princes in Purgatory forms an exception to these statements, being not only beautiful, but painted with many details.

Most of the circles of Hell and the terraces of Purgatory are level.[2] The third *girone* of the seventh circle of the former is a vast sandy desert;[3] at the foot of Mount Purgatory the wanderers made their way across a solitary plain,[4] and higher up the mountain on one of

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Allor fu'io più timido allo scoscio;
Perocch' io vidi fuochi e sentii pianti;
Ond' io tremando tutto mi raccoscio.'
(*Inf.*, xvii. 115-123.)

[1] *Inf.*, iv. 8.

[2] The floor of Malebolge and Cocytus slopes toward the centre.

[3] *Inf.*, xxiv. 13-15.

[4] 'Noi andavam per lo solingo piano' (*Purg.*, i. 118).

the terraces they found themselves on a 'plain more lonely than a road through the desert.'[1] The Earthly Paradise may be looked upon as an elevated plateau.[2]

Dante's references to the different forms of water are very numerous, ranging from springs and fountains to the great ocean which 'engarlands the earth.' The use of the former is almost entirely conventional. We find such expressions as fountain 'of hope' and 'of grace;'[3] Vergil is addressed by Dante as 'the fountain from which issued so large a river of eloquence;'[4] and in another place we are told to 'open our hearts to the waters of peace which spring up from the eternal fountain.'[5] In one passage, however, the origin of rivers and lakes is attributed to the *mille fonti e più*, which rise on the slopes of the mountains and descend in ever-increasing volume to the valleys below.[6]

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[1] 'Ristemmo su in un piano,
Solingo più che strade per diserti' (*Purg.*, x. 20-21).
There are further topographical references to the plains of Tuscany (*Purg.*, v. 99), Lombardy (*Inf.*, xxviii. 74-75).

[2] This is Milton's idea also. (Cf. *Par. Lost*, iv. 131 ff.)

[3] *Par.*, xxxiii. 12; xx. 118-119. [4] *Inf.*, i. 79-80.

[5] *Purg.*, xv. 131-132. Cf. also *Par.*, iv. 116; xxxi. 93; xxiv. 9.

[6] *Inf.*, xx. 64-66.

The clearness and transparency of water are often beautifully rendered, whether he speaks of a flower-covered hill reflected from top to bottom,[1] or of the

'Peschiera ch'è tranquilla e pura,'[2]

or the little stream beneath whose surface we can see the green grass bending with the current.[3] At times the surface is so smooth that it reflects like a mirror.[4] In one passage the poet, with an accurate touch, describes the souls in the moon as being dimly seen, like the reflection from the stilly surface of clear water, 'when it is not so deep that the bottom cannot be seen.'[5]

In the sixth terrace of Purgatory there is a slender waterfall, falling from a high rock, and

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[1] 'E come clivo in acqua di suo imo
Si specchia, quasi per vedersi adorno,
Quando è nel verde e ne' fioretti opimo.
(*Par.*, xxx. 109-111.)

[2] *Par.*, v. 100.

[3] *Purg.*, xxviii. 26-30.

[4] *Purg.*, xxx. 76-77.

[5] 'O ver per acque nitide e tranquille,
Non sì profonde che i fondi sien persi,
Tornan de' nostri visi le postille
Debili sì, che perla in bianca fronte
Non vien men forte alle nostre pupille.'
(*Par.*, iii. 11-15.)

dissipating itself in drops over the branches of the tree, whose luscious fruits fill the souls of the gluttonous with hopeless desire;[1] in the *Inferno* the wanderers hear in the distance the noise of an immense body of water plunging over a precipice, sounding at first like the buzzing of bees; but as they approach, becoming so loud as to drown the sound of their voices.[2]

There are several passages referring to marshes—the great circular Styx which surrounds the dolorous city of Dis, in whose foul and stagnant waters are plunged the souls of the wrathful; the marshes about Mantua,[3] caused by the widening out of the river Mincio, and those near Ravenna left by the receding sea.

The details of the origin, growth, and final fate of rivers are numerous in the *Divina Commedia*; and we have allusions to the fountains

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[1] 'Cadea dall' alta roccia un liquor chiaro;
E si spandeva per le foglie suso.'
(*Purg.*, xxii. 137-138.)

[2] *Inf.*, xvi. 1-3, and 92-93. *Herzog Ernst*, an old German poem, offers rather an interesting parallel here of a waterfall heard but not seen: 'Si hôrten grôze brûsen, als ob daz wazzer taete ein val' (Lüning, *Die Natur*, pp. 84-85).

[3] *Inf.*, xx. 79-81.

and springs which are their source,[1] to the torrents swollen by melting snow,[2] to the little streams and the royal rivers, that, having gathered into themselves their tributaries, find at last a resting-place in the great deep.[3] The varying depth of their waters is quaintly referred to in the line—

'Come fiume ch' acquista o perde lena.'[4]

The number of specific rivers referred to is remarkable, mostly, it is true, as a convenient means of fixing localities.[5] Yet we have the attributes of a number of them — the slow-moving Chiana,[6] the petrifying waters of the Elsa,[7] and the many-tributaried Po.[8] Often we can trace the whole course of the river from its source to its mouth. This is especially true of the Arno, the Po, and the Mincio.[9] In

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[1] *Inf.*, xx. 64; *Par.*, xx. 21.
[2] *Inf.*, xv. 7-9.
[3] *Inf.*, v. 99.
[4] *Purg.*, xxviii. 123.
[5] This is of constant occurrence; thus Bologna is referred to as 'tra Savena e'l Reno' (*Inf.*, xviii. 61); and Bohemia is

'La terra dove l'acqua nasce
Che Molta in Albia, ed Albia in mar ne porta.'
(*Purg.*, vii. 98-99.)

Other examples abound. Cf. similar use of mountains, rivers, etc., for names of modern departments of France.
[6] *Par.*, xiii. 23.
[7] *Purg.*, xxxiii. 67.
[8] *Inf.*, v. 98-99.
[9] See pages 66-67.

different passages Dante describes the gentle flow of peaceful streams,[1] the onward rush of well-fountained rivers,[2] the roar of the torrent,[3] and the wide devastation wrought by the flood;[4] or the waters turned by man to his own use, irrigating the soil[5] and turning the wheels of the mill.[6]

If the beauty of mountain scenery is a modern discovery, it is not so with the sea. Homer has given many a description of it, sparkling with laughing ripples or lashed by the fury of the storm. So, too, Horace and Catullus[7] and Vergil have felt its charm, and the wealthy Romans loved to build their villas close to the shore, where its waves could be seen and heard constantly.[8]

Dante's use of the sea was largely metaphorical. Of course, in speaking of the sea of

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[1] *Purg.*, xxviii. 25-33.

[2] 'Udir mi parve un mormorar di fiume,
Che scenda chiaro giù di pietra in pietra,
Mostrando l'ubertà del suo cacume' (*Par.*, xx. 19-21).

[3] *Par.*, xii. 99. [4] *Purg.*, v. 121 ff. [5] *Par.*, xii. 104.

[6] 'Non corse mai sì tosto acqua per doccia
A volger ruota di mulin terragno' (*Inf.*, xxiii. 46-47).

[7] Cf. the beautiful lines of Catullus—
'Hic, qualis flatu placidum mare matutino,' etc.
(64, 269 ff.)

[8] Cf. Friedländer, ii. 206.

life,[1] he follows almost universal custom. The immeasurable depths of God's wisdom are illustrated by means of the ocean, and in the following two incomparable lines he seems to have reproduced the majestic dignity of the great deep :—

> 'In la sua volontade è nostra pace ;
> Ella è quel mare, al qual tutto si muove.'[2]

Again, he compares his poem to the sea, the *Inferno* being a *mar crudele*,[3] while in the *Purgatorio* the ship of his genius lifts its sails to run over better waters,[4] and the difficulties of the *Paradiso* are compared to those attendant upon a voyage, like that of Ulysses over the unknown Western ocean.[5]

Undoubtedly Dante was influenced by his predecessors in his use of the sea ; yet there are many touches which bear the imprint of his own observation and personal feelings. He follows his master, Brunetto Latini, in conceiving the earth as surrounded by the great

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[1] *Inf.*, xxvii. 81 ; cf. also *Convito*, iv. 28 : 'E qui è da sapere, che siccome dice Tullio in quello *di senettute*, la naturale morte è quasi porto a noi di lunga navigazione.'

[2] *Par.*, iii. 85-86. [3] *Purg.*, i. 3. [4] *Ibid.* 1-2.

[5] *Par.*, ii. 1 ff. ; also *Par.*, xxiii. 67-69.

circular sea;[1] and after this the Mediterranean is called the greatest.[2] In one passage he alludes to its gradual deepening until it becomes unfathomable in the open sea,[3] and its vastness is often referred to.[4] It is the final resting place of all streams.[5]

In all these references to the sea there is a strange absence of colour in the descriptions. Even Homer has the epithets 'dark' and 'purple,' and Vergil calls it 'azure.'[6] The waters of the Mediterranean are very beautiful, and show every shade of colour according to circumstances; but of all this there is not a word in the *Divina Commedia.*

The loneliness of the deep is referred to where the poet speaks of the 'waters never

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[1] *Par.*, ix. 84. Cf. *Li Trésor*, p. 115, also p. 151.

[2] *Par.*, ix. 82-87; the Provençal *Elucidari* likewise calls the Mediterranean *la mar major* (Bartsch, *Chrest. Provençal*, 371).

[3] 'Com'occhio per lo mare, entro s'interna;
Che benchè dalla proda veggia il fondo,
In pelago non vede' (*Par.*, xix. 60-62).

[4] *Purg.*, ii. 33; *Par.*, xxiii. 67. There are a number of expressions, such as *alto mare* (*Inf.*, xxvi. 100), *lontan' acque* (*Purg.*, viii. 57), *larghe onde* (*Purg.*, viii. 70).

[5] 'Ella è quel mare, al qual tutto si muove' (*Par.*, iii. 86).

[6] *Odyssey*, pp. 63, 97, 66 of Butcher's translation; *Æneid*, xii. 182.

sailed over by man';[1] but there are many passages which show it to us enlivened by the passing of ships. We see their white sails swollen with the wind,[2] the mast rising from the waves with a swift upward sweep,[3] the boat sailing so fast as scarcely to sink in the water,[4] cutting deeper the more it is loaded,[5] or striking sails as it approaches the harbour.[6]

In Purgatory the sea is on all sides; it is the background of every scene. Every now and then as the poet makes his way over the rough path, the sea is shut from his sight by the mass of projecting rocks and boulders, and then as he turns a corner he sees it stretching out to immeasurable distances. Even in the quiet valleys, or when he lies down to sleep on the steps from one terrace to another, we seem to catch the deep booming of its waves against

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[1] 'Che mai non vide navigar sue acque
Uom' (*Purg.*, i. 131).

[2] 'Quali dal vento le gonfiate vele' (*Inf.*, vii. 13).

[3] 'Come albero in nave si levò' (*Inf.*, xxxi. 145).

[4] 'Con un vassello snelletto e leggiero,
Tanto che l'acqua nulla ne inghiottiva.'
(*Purg.*, ii. 41, 42.)

[5] 'Secando se ne va l'antica prora
Dell' acqua, piu che non suol con altrui.'
(*Inf.*, viii. 29, 30.)

[6] *Inf.*, xxvii. 81; cf. also *Convito*, iv. 28.

the cliffs far below. In all these Purgatorial descriptions the sea is calm and peaceful; its surface is smooth, and reflects the light of the morning star in long tremulous rays.[1] There is one passage in which the influence of the moon on the tides is referred to, constantly in her journey around the earth, covering and laying bare the ocean shores.[2]

The dangers of the sea are referred to by Dante.

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[1] *Purg.*, i. 117.

But the most poetical reference to the sea is not contained in the *Divina Commedia*, but in the sonnet to Guido Cavalcanti—

'Guido, vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io
Fossimo presi per incantamento,
E messi ad un vascel, ch'ad ogni vento
Per mare andasse a voler vostro e mio;
Sicchè fortuna, od altro tempo rio
Non ci potesse dare impedimento,
Anzi vivendo sempre in un talento,
Di stare insieme crescesse il disio.
E monna Vanna e monna Bice poi,
Con quella ch'è sul numero del trenta
Con noi ponesse il buono incantatore;
E quivi ragionar sempre d'amore:
E ciascuna di lor fosse contenta,
Siccome io credo che sariamo noi.'

(*Sonetto*, xxxii.)

[2] 'E come 'l volger del ciel della Luna
Cuopre e discuopre i liti senza posa.'

(*Par.*, xvi. 82, 83.)

These lines recall those of Keats in which he speaks of—

'The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.'

In the first canto of *Purgatorio* he calls it cruel, and in metaphors shows it lashed by the fury of the storm.[1] We are told of the ship which escapes all perils of the deep only to perish at the harbour;[2] we see men flung overboard;[3] the diver rising from the deep water;[4] and those who arrive panting on shore, turn to look back at the dangers they have escaped.[5]

In the story of Ulysses' last voyage we find a vivid picture of shipwreck on the open sea, in a passage which is full of grandeur. It is hard for us to realise with what feelings the men of the Middle Ages looked out upon the unknown ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules. To-day, as we stand on the seashore, we may feel the majesty, the vastness, and the danger of it; but there is no mystery about it. We know the conformation of its bed, the fauna and flora

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1 'Che mugghia come fa mar per tempesta.'
(*Inf.*, v. 29; cf. also *Purg.*, xxxii. 116.)

2 'E legno vidi già dritto e veloce
Correr lo mar per tutto suo cammino,
Perire alfine all' entrar della foce.'
(*Par.*, xiii. 136-138.)

3 'Gittati saran fuor di lor vassello' (*Inf.*, xxviii. 79).

4 *Inf.*, xvi. 133, 134.

5 'E come quei, che con lena affannata
Uscito fuor del pelago alla riva,
Si volge all' acqua perigliosa, e guata.'
(*Inf.*, i. 22-24.)

of the deep, and that beyond it are the great cities of Europe. To Dante and his contemporaries everything was vague and mysterious.[1] The Pillars of Hercules were set up,

'In order that man might not venture beyond.'[2]

Columbus was not the first to 'burst into that silent sea.' We are told that the Canary Islands were discovered in the thirteenth century by Genoese sailors,[3] and that in the year 1291 two boats passed through the Strait of Gibraltar, sailed out over the Atlantic toward the West, and were never heard of again.[4]

There can be no doubt that Dante was acquainted with these facts, and probably had them in mind in describing the last voyage of Ulysses. May he not also, in the following lines, have given expression to his own eager curiosity to know something of the *mondo senza gente* beyond the setting sun?

'Brothers, I said, who to the west have come,
Through myriad toils and dangers, oh do not,

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[1] 'Für das ganze Mittelalter war der westliche Ocean nicht bloss unbekannt, sondern wie verboten' (Wegele, *Dante Alighieri's Leben und Werke*, p. 415.)

[2] 'Acciochè l'uom più oltre non si metta' (*Inf.*, xxvi. 109).

[3] Cf. Burckhardt, vol. ii. p. 4.

[4] *Jahrbücher für Phil. und Paed.*, vol. xcii. p. 275.

Unto this little vigil of your life
Which still remains, deny the experience
Of the unpeopled world beyond the sun.'[1]

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[1] *Inf.*, xxvi. 112-117. Similar descriptions can be found in *Orlando Furioso*, xv. 22, and Camoëns, i. 19. These, however, were written after the voyage of Columbus. Ulysses' longing for the sea finds an interesting parallel in the Anglo-Saxon poem of the Seafarer: 'Hveteth on wälweg hrether unvearnum ofer holma gelagu' (Lüning, p. 95).

CHAPTER VI

ATMOSPHERIC PHENOMENA

As the two poets are walking along the fifth terrace of Purgatory, they are overtaken by Statius, who at Dante's request explains the cause of a tremendous earthquake which had occurred a short time before; in this explanation the atmospheric conditions of Purgatory are described. We know already, from Dante's *Cosmos*, that the earth is surrounded by the atmosphere, then by a sphere of fire, after which come the nine concentric circles of the heavens. This earthly atmosphere ends with the Gate of Purgatory; hence all above that place rises up into ether[1] and is free from atmospheric changes, so that the slopes of the holy mountain never know the phenomena of rain and hail and snow, of rain-

[1] *Aer vivo* (*Purg.*, xxviii. 107).

bow, lightning, wind, and thunder.[1] All these phenomena are confined to the earth, or Ante-Purgatory, or are alluded to in metaphors. It is true that we hear of a soft and steady breeze that sweeps over the tree-tops in the Earthly Paradise,[2] but this is caused by the rotary motion of the heavens about the earth.[3]

In the Inferno the air is heavy and thick and dark; the poet employs many terms to describe its foulness and horror; it is called *maligno, perso, grasso, grosso, fosco, amaro e sozzo e morto.* The angelic messenger who comes to the gates of the City of Dis, which have been defiantly shut in the face of the wanderers, is filled with suffering in the foul

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[1] 'Libero è qui da ogni alterazione

. . . . .

Perchè non pioggia, non grando, non neve,
Non rugiada, non brina più su cade,
Che la scaletta de' tre gradi breve.'

(*Purg.*, xxi. 43-48. Cf. also *Purg.*, xxviii. 97-102.)

There is a remarkable similarity here to the description of Olympus in the *Odyssey* (p. 93 of Butcher and Lang's translation)—'Not by winds is it shaken, nor ever wet with rain, nor doth the snow come nigh thereto, but most clear air is spread about it cloudless, and the white light floats over it.' And yet the poet had in all probability never read Homer.

[2] 'Un' aura dolce, senza mutamento
Avere in sè' (*Purg.*, xxviii. 7, 8).

[3] Cf. *Purg.*, xxviii. 103-108.

atmosphere of the fifth circle, and waves his hand before his face as if to clear it away.[1]

In Purgatory, on the other hand, the air is bright, pure, sweet, and fresh; it is the

'Aer dolce che dal sol s'allegra,'[2]

which seems so infinitely sweet to the yearning memory of the souls in the Stygian Marsh, who had learned too late how to prize the gifts of Nature. The scene in the opening canto of the *Purgatorio* seems vivified and fresh with the salt breezes that blow in from the ocean. The Mountain of Purgatory, rising from the midst of the vast ocean, calm as a summer sea, is bathed in sunshine, swept by sweet breezes, arched by blue skies whose azure depths are never veiled by clouds.

But while the Inferno is always dark and gloomy, and Purgatory always clear and bright, we have every phase of cloud effects in metaphor and figure. It seems probable that the sky, during the day as well as at night, possessed a charm for Dante. He shows us the

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[1] 'Dal volto rimovea quell' aer grasso,
Menando la sinistra innanzi spesso;
E sol di quella angoscia parea lasso.'
(*Inf.*, ix. 82-84.)

[2] *Inf.*, vii. 122.

heavens shrouded by heavy clouds, dark as night, when the eye can only dimly pierce the obscurity, and objects like a windmill can scarcely be seen.[1] Again, we see the clouds flushed with rosy colour at sunrise,[2] or crimson at sunset,[3] and traversed by shooting stars in August.[4] The ruddy colour of Mars is rendered still more red by the vaporous clouds that hang over the horizon.[5] We see the thick mist that tempers the light of the sun;[6] and the heavy all-enshrouding fog[7] gradually becoming thinner and thinner as the sun peers through it. In one passage is described the peculiar effect produced by clouds scudding over a high tower, which to the spectator below seems toppling over.[8]

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[1] 'Come quando una grossa nebbia spira,
O quando l'emisperio nostro annotta,
Par da lungi un mulin, che il vento gira.'
(*Inf.*, xxxiv. 4-6.)

[2] 'La parte oriental tutta rosata' (*Purg.*, xxx. 23).

[3] 'Di quel color, che, per lo Sole avverso
Nube dipinge da sera e da mane.'
(*Par.*, xxvii. 28-29.

[4] 'Vapori accesi non vid' io sì tosto,
. . . . . .
Sol calando, nuvole d'agosto' (*Purg.*, v. 37-39).

[5] *Purg.*, ii. 14.

[6] *Par.*, v. 133-135. Cf. also *Convito*, ii. 16, 'Quasi come nebulette mattutine alla faccia del sole.'

[7] *Purg.*, xvii. 1-6; and *Inf.*, xxxi. 34-36.

[8] *Inf.*, xxxi. 136-138.

The moisture of the atmosphere, according to Dante, plays an important part in the phenomena of Nature. It is the cause of the rainbow,[1] and the halo about the moon;[2] while rain is condensed[3] and snow frozen vapour.[4] Rain is usually used in a figurative sense, the word *piover* itself being often equivalent to fall, descend,[5] produce,[6] hurl headlong.[7] But there are two literal descriptions of it; one in the *Inferno*, where we see the gluttons beaten down upon by heavy, sullen, unchanging torrents of blackish water, mingled with hail and snow and slush, making a *sozza mistura*.[8] Thunderstorms are alluded to in Vanni Fucci's malignant words to Dante, prophesying the evil

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[1] *Par.*, xxviii. 23-24; and *Purg.*, xxv. 91-93.

[2] *Par.*, x. 67-69.

[3] 'Quell' umido vapor, che in acqua riede
Tosto che sale dove 'l freddo il coglie.'
(*Purg.*, v. 110-111.)

[4] *Par.*, xxvii. 67. Brunetto Latini calls snow, *vapors engelées* (p. 119).

[5] *Inf.*, xxiv. 122; xxx. 95; *Par.*, iii. 90.

[6] *Inf.*, xxxiii. 108.

[7] *Inf.*, viii. 83.

[8] 'Io sono al terzo cerchio della piova
Eterna, maledetta, fredda e greve:
Regola e qualità mai non l'è nuova.
Grandine grossa, ed acqua tinta, e neve
Per l'aer tenebroso si riversa' (*Inf.*, vi. 7-11).

which was to come to Florence and to him;[1] and also in the remarkable passage in which Buonconte describes the fate of his lifeless body after the battle of Campaldino. Here we find given every detail of the gradual rising of the furious storm of wind and rain, how the vapour rises from the sea, is condensed by the cold, and driven by the wind; how the great clouds settle over the valley, and the pregnant air is changed to rain, which falls in such quantity that the earth cannot absorb it all, and the superfluous water runs into the ditches, thence to the streams, which in their turn pour into the Archiano, a tributary of the *fiume real*, as the poet calls the Arno. All these details, so minute, and yet couched in language full of poetic beauty, are contained in less than twenty lines. Mr. Ruskin exclaims: 'There is, I feel assured, nothing else like it in all the range of poetry.'[2]

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[1] 'Tragge Marte vapor di Val di Magra,
Ch'è di torbidi nuvoli involuto,
E con tempesta impetuosa ed agra,' etc.
(*Inf.*, xxiv. 145 ff.)

[2] 'Ben sai come nell' aere si raccoglie
Quell' umido vapor, che in acqua riede
Tosto che sale dove 'l freddo il coglie:
Giunto quel mal voler, che pur mal chiede,
Con lo intelletto, e' mosse 'l fumo e 'l vento
Per la virtù che sua natura diede.

The refreshing, beneficent phases of rain are only glancingly alluded to in such expressions as—

'Refreshing showers of everlasting grace,'[1]

Indi la valle, come 'l dì fu spento,
Da Pratomagno al gran giogo coperse
Di nebbia; e 'l ciel di sopra fece intento
Sì, che 'l pregno aere in acqua si converse.
La pioggia cadde; ed a' fossati venne
Di lei ciò, che la terra non sofferse:
E come a' rivi grandi si convenne,
Vêr lo fiume real tanto veloce
Si ruinò, che nulla la ritenne.
Lo corpo mio gelato in su la foce
Trovò l' Archian rubesto; e quel sospinse
Nell' Arno, e sciolse al mio petto la croce
Ch'io fei di me quando 'l dolor mi vinse:
Voltommi per le ripe e per lo fondo;
Poi di sua preda mi coperse e cinse.'

(*Purg.*, v. 109-129.)

Since writing the above, I have come across the following remarkable parallel, which Dante seems to have imitated almost word for word. The poet, however, adds to the effectiveness of the picture by showing us the body of Buonconte at the mercy of the elements: 'Oportet enim, inferioribus partibus ex propinquitate solis calefactis, resolvi vapores ex aquis, quibus sursum ascendentibus propter calorem, cum pervenerint ad locum ubi deficit calor propter distantiam a loco ubi reverberantur radii solis, necesse est quod aqua vaporabiliter ascendens congeletur ibidem; et congelatione facta vapores vertantur in aquam, et cum aqua fuerit generata, necesse est quod cadat deorsum propter gravitatem' (Carbonel, *Divi Thomae Aquinatis Excerpta Philosophica*, I. p. 971).

M. Carbonel exclaims: 'Remarquez l'exactitude de cette explication naturelle de la pluie.'

[1] *Par.*, xiv. 27.

and

'Rich showers of grace sent by the Holy Ghost,'[1]

which are Biblical expressions, and used here conventionally.

A very interesting parallel to the detailed description of a rainstorm, given above, is seen in a similar picture of the rise and progress of a snowstorm, given in the *Canzoniere.* Here we see a wind rising from the sands of Ethiopia, heated by the sun, crossing the sea, and bearing with it thence heavy clouds with which it covers the skies; then freezing and falling in white flakes of snow and rain.[2]

In general, winter, with all its phenomena, is disagreeable to Dante, as well as to his contemporaries; yet there are certain passages which seem to show some appreciation on the poet's part of the beauty of snow. He calls it beautiful in the *Vita Nuova*,[3] and its pure

[1] *Par.*, xxiv. 91-92.

[2] 'Levasi della rena d'Etiopia
Un vento pellegrin, che l'aer turba,
Per la spera del sol, ch'or la riscalda;
E passa il mare, onde n'adduce copia
Di nebbia tal, che s'altro non la sturba,
Questo emispero chiude tutto, e salda:
E poi si solve, e cade in bianca falda
Di fredda neve, ed in noiosa pioggia.'
(Moore, *Tutte le Opere*, p. 166.)

[3] Bella neve, § 18.

white colour is often referred to.[1] The peculiar, soft effect of the flakes as they fall on a windless day is rendered admirably by the line—

'Come di neve in alpe senza vento.'[2]

In the beautiful description of the ascent of the angels in Paradise, he compares their moving through the air to the heavy snowflakes that fall in January.[3] In still other passages we see the snow lying in the valleys and on the mountain summits, blown about and hardened by the north winds,[4] or melting under the warm rays of the sun.[5] In one vivid picture, already alluded to, we see the farmer, rising at early dawn, and filled with dismay at the sight of the fields, covered, as he thinks, with snow, but which turns out to be merely frost—

'The image of its white sister.'[6]

All through the *Divina Commedia*, God is represented as the sun of light and life, warming the universe. The souls of the Blessed

[1] *Par.*, xxxi. 15; *Purg.*, xxix. 126. [2] *Inf.*, xiv. 30.

[3] *Par.*, xxvii. 67-69. In the *Convito* there is a description of a heavy snowfall, covering roads and fences, which reminds us involuntarily of Longfellow's 'Afternoon in February' (*Convito*, iv. 7).

[4] *Purg.*, xxx. 85-87, and *Inf.*, xxviii. 58.

[5] *Purg.*, xxx. 88-90. This is a very common figure among all poets, ancient and modern.

[6] *Inf.*, xxiv. 4-9.

burn with *ardente amore.*[1] Hence, when the poet treats of traitors in whom all love of God and man has died out, he describes them as being in a region of eternal cold, at the furthest possible distance from the Almighty.

In the Lake Cocytus, the lowest region of the *basso Inferno,*[2] the air is so bitter that it shrivels up the faces of the damned, freezes the tears in their eyes, and causes their teeth to chatter incessantly. As we read these lines, we seem to shiver with the poet in this *eterno rezzo.*[3]

He has produced a powerful impression of an icy wind,[4] which freezes the water so hard and clear,[5] that we can see the wretched sinners imprisoned in it like straws in glass.[6] Notice the accuracy of the touch in the line, in which he says that if a mountain should fall on the ice, it would not crack *even at the edge.*[7]

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[1] *Par.*, xxv. 108.
[2] *Inf.*, viii. 75, and xii. 35.
[3] *Inf.*, xxxii. 22 ff.
[4] 'Sì che tre venti si movean da ello,
Quindi Cocito tutto s'aggelava' (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 51-52).
[5] 'Un lago, che per gielo,
Avea di vetro, e non d'acqua, sembiante.'
(*Inf.*, xxxii. 23-24.)
[6] 'Come festuca in vetro' (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 12).
[7] 'Chè se Tabernicch
Vi fosse su caduto, o Pietrapana,
Non avria pur dall' orlo fatto cricch.'
(*Inf.*, xxxii. 28-30.)

Dante follows Aristotle in distinguishing two kinds of vapour, humid and dry; from the former are produced rain, snow, hail, dew, frost; from the latter, if it is thin, comes the wind, if it is pent in the earth, the earthquake.[1] The references to the latter are not many; the shores of the Acheron are said to tremble profoundly,[2] the earth shook with horror at the crucifixion of the Saviour,[3] and the whole extent of the Infernal regions seemed about to crash together in a chaotic mass;[4] the tremendous landslide on Monte Barco, near Rovereto,[5] is conjecturally attributed to the effect of earthquakes.[6]

The phenomena of the wind are given in great

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[1] *Purg.*, xxi. 52 and 56. Tasso imitates Dante in *Ger. Lib.* iv. 3.

[2] 'La buia campagna
Tremò sì forte' (*Inf.*, iii. 130-131).

[3] 'Per lei tremò la terra e 'l ciel s'aperse' (*Par.*, vii. 48).

[4] 'Da tutte parti l'alta valle feda
Tremò sì, ch'io pensai che l'Universo
Sentisse amor' (*Inf.*, xii. 40-42).

[5] Some think Dante refers to the mass of rocks of Chiusa, near Rivoli, due to a landslide which occurred in 1310.

[6] 'Qual è quella ruina, che nel fianco
Di qua da Trento l'Adice percosse,
O per tremoto, o per sostegno manco.'
(*Inf.*, xii. 4-6.)

Other allusions to earthquakes are found in *Inf.*, xxxi. 106; *Purg.*, xx. 128; xxi. 70.

variety. The poet describes it blowing where it listeth, restlessly moving hither and thither,[1] bending the tops of the trees,[2] tossing about feathers,[3] turning windmills,[4] swelling the sails of ships,[5] and driving them forward blithe and free.[6] We have a striking description of the brisk north wind, sweeping away all impurities and clearing the air, so that the stars shine with unwonted brilliancy.[7] Some of the passages are of great beauty, as, for instance, where the poet tells how

> 'The morning breeze of May-tide moves
> And stirs, the fragrant harbinger of day,
> All pregnant with the scent of grass and flowers;'[8]

or that other passage descriptive of the soft

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[1] 'Vento ch'or vien quinci ed or vien quindi' (*Purg.*, xi. 101).

[2] 'Come la fronda, che flette la cima
Nel transito del vento' (*Par.*, xxvi. 85-86).
Cf. also *Purg.*, xxviii. 10-11, and *Par.*, xvii. 133-134.

[3] *Par.*, v. 74.

[4] *Inf.*, xxxiv. 6.

[5] 'Quali dal vento le gonfiate vele' (*Inf.*, vii. 13).

[6] 'Sì come nave pinta da buon vento' (*Purg.*, xxiv. 3).

[7] 'Come rimane splendido e sereno
L'emisperio dell'aere, quando soffia
Borea da quella guancia ond' è più leno,
Per che si purga e risolve la roffia,
Che pria turbava, si che'l ciel ne ride
Con le bellezze d'ogni sua paroffia.'
(*Par.*, xxviii. 79 84.)

[8] *Purg.*, xxiv. 145-147.

wind that gently fanned the forehead of Dante in the Earthly Paradise.[1]

But he speaks also of the wilder, fiercer aspects of the wind, uprooting oaks,[2] tossing ships about a tempestuous sea,[3] and blowing keen and cold over the ice-bound Cocytus.[4] There is specific reference to the treacherous wind that blows from Mount Focara, near *la Cattolica*, on the Adriatic, to escape which sailors make vows to God.[5]

A word or two concerning Dante's use of the seasons may not be out of place here. The *Divina Commedia* opens with the spring. The poet finds himself lost in the wood on Easter Day, in the year of our Lord 1300. There are two reasons why he should choose

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[1] *Purg.*, xxviii. 7-12. Cf. also

> 'In quella parte, ove surge ad aprire
> Zeffiro dolce le novelle fronde,
> Di che si vede Europa rivestire' (*Par.*, xii. 46-48).

[2] *Purg.*, xxxi. 70-72.

[3] 'Nave senza nocchiero in gran tempesta' (*Purg.*, vi. 77). Cf. also *Inf.*, xxvi. 137-142.

[4] *Inf.*, xxxiv. 51-52.

[5] *Inf.*, xxviii. 89-90.

Other atmospheric phenomena are occasionally alluded to, but usually in a conventional manner, as thunder, to express a loud noise (*Inf.*, iv. 1-2 and 8-9; *Ibid.* xxxi. 12-13; lightning, to express rapidity (*Par.*, xxv. 81); and rainbows, for brilliant colours (*Par.*, xii. 10-12). The mystery of the Trinity is vaguely depicted by means of a triple rainbow (*Par.*, xxxiii. 118-120).

this season rather than any other. As the poem is a religious (as well as a political) allegory, it was eminently proper that the soul which was turned to repentance, and led through Purgatory to the celestial spheres, should do this at the hallowed season of the year which witnessed the death and resurrection of the Saviour; and in which, according to ancient tradition, God created the world.[1] Moreover, astrology proclaimed that at Easter the conjunction of the heavenly bodies was peculiarly favourable to man, and disposed him to better things.[2]

But undoubtedly Dante was also largely influenced by the spirit of the times; there is scarcely a single old French, German, or English mediæval romance that does not begin with April or May, Easter or Pentecost.[3] Nor is the reason for this hard to find. The whole ancient and mediæval world seemed to have an inborn dread of winter, and the only mention we find of it is one of complaint, or as an

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[1] *Inf.*, i. 38-40. Cf. Brunetto Latini, 'Et porce que Diex fist lors toutes choses en cel bon et droit point, fu li jors aussi granz comme la nuiz' (*Li Trésor*, pp. 132-133).

[2] *Par.*, i. 39-42.

[3] See the opening lines of the *Canterbury Tales*, *Reinecke Fuchs*, etc.

antithesis to spring and summer.[1] We must remember that to the Middle Ages it was a period of cold and discomfort; both castle and hut were poorly protected against the inclemency of the weather, and outdoor life was disagreeable. In some respects night was regarded in the Middle Ages with the same antipathetic feelings as winter. Hence the long nights of winter were an additional cause of dislike.[2] There seems to be little feeling for the beauty of winter landscapes in the *Divina Commedia*;[3] the phases of it

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[1] Thus Walther von der Vogelweide says—

'Uns hât der winter geschadet über al.'

And adds—

'Möhte ich verslâfen des winters zît!'

(Wilmann's Edition, p. 201.)

[2] Lovers alone form an exception to this dislike of night; one of the commonest forms of mediæval lyrical poetry are the *aubades*, where lovers lament the coming of the dawn, which brings the hour of their separation. The only good thing Walther von der Vogelweide can say of winter, is that the nights are long, and hence pleasant for lovers—

'Hât der Winter kurzen tac
Sô hât er die langen naht,' etc. (Wilmann, p. 393.)

[3] Still, as we have before remarked, the expression used in describing the slow falling of snow in the stilly air of the Alps does not preclude the possibility of some feeling for the grace, the purity, and the softness of it.[1]

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[1] *Inf.*, xiv. 30.

seen in Cocytus are chilling to body and soul.

Spring came to the mediæval world as a deliverance from the bondage of winter, and its advent was hailed with universal joy. The poems of troubadour and minnesinger are full of oft-repeated rhapsodies of sun and sky, flowers and birds. Nowhere was the spring more welcomed than in Florence.[1] It was at a May party that Dante first met Beatrice, and the *Vita Nuova* is wrapped in an atmosphere of spring; to him, as to his contemporaries, it was the

> 'Dolce tempo novello, quando piove
> Amore in terra da tutti li cieli.[2]

Hence we find more allusions to this season in the *Divina Commedia* than any other. The breezes that blow over Purgatory are those of spring,[3] the flowers and grass and leaves of the trees are in the first early bloom of their beauty, and the song of the birds is heard in

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[1] 'Quivi il rivegliarsi della natura era, ed è ancora, più che altrove festeggiato e l'allegra canzone maggiaiola esprimeva la gioia commune' (Lumini, *Il Sentimento della Natura in Dante*, p. 13. Cf. also Villani, *Croniche*, vii. 89.)

[2] *Canzone*, xv., Moore, p. 167.

[3] *Purg.*, xxiv. 145-147.

the Earthly Paradise, that land of changeless beauty where eternal spring abides.[1]

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[1] 'Qui primavera sempre' (*Purg.*, xxviii. 143).

Cf. also 'In questa primavera sempiterna' (*Par.*, xxviii. 116).

Autumn and summer are occasionally alluded to; thus we see the harvest season,[1] the vine-grower closing up his hedges as the grapes begin to ripen,[2] and the suffocating heat of the dog days.[3] Dante refers most often to the season in terms of astronomy; but he also at times uses phases of rural life, or animals, or even insects for this purpose.[4]

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[1] *Inf.*, xxxii. 32-33; xxvi. 26-30.

[2] *Purg.*, iv. 19-21.

[3] *Inf.*, xxv. 80.

[4] Cf. *Inf.*, xxxii. 31-33; and xxvi. 25-30; *Purg.*, iv. 21, 'quando l'uva imbruna.'

CHAPTER VII

THE FLORA OF THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

A LOVE for flowers seems to be more or less characteristic of the Middle Ages. Although the early Italian masters make no use of landscape as a background, yet we find many of their pictures luxuriant with garlands of leaves and flowers, often carefully and accurately rendered.[1] The troubadours and minnesingers abound in references to them, although these references are mostly of a conventional character; and flowers, like birds and blue skies, were treated chiefly as forming part of the joy and beauty of spring.[2]

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[1] Ghirlandaio received his name on account of his fondness for painting garlands.

[2] The garden with its flowers and trees was a favourite place in the Middle Ages, and shares, with the chamber of the beloved, the honour of being selected as a rendezvous of lovers. A favourite occupation for ladies was to sally forth at early morn into the fields, there to pluck flowers and weave them into garlands. Flowers, however, had a practical side,

We find passages in the *Divina Commedia* which seem to indicate that Dante shared this love; yet the number and variety of flowers here is not great, and the references are mostly general, although invariably fine. Such, for example, is the line—

'Painted with wonderful flowers of spring,'[1]

used to describe the banks of the river of light in the Empyrean. Such also is the passage where Beatrice appears to the poet in the Earthly Paradise, shining like the sun through the rosy vapours of morning, in the midst of a cloud of flowers, which are thrown by

'Ministers and messengers of life everlasting,'

who sing, while casting their flowers above and around her, the beautiful line from the *Æneid*:—

'Manibus o date lilia plenis.'[2]

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and were used as head-dresses, and on festive occasions the floor of rooms, and even the streets, were strewn with them. (See Schultz, *Das Höfische Leben zur Zeit der Minnesinger*, i. pp. 181, 345-347; ii. 64, 81, 493, 501. Cf. also Mahn, iv. 87.)

[1] 'Dipinte di mirabil primavera' (*Par.*, xxx. 63).

[2] 'Così dentro una nuvola di fiori
Che dalle mani angeliche saliva,
E ricadeva giù dentro e di fuori
. . . .
Donna m'apparve' (*Purg.*, xxx. 28-32).
See also the preceding lines from 18 on.

This is one of the most lovely passages in literature, yet the flowers are alluded to in a most general way, and not a single detail of colour, shape, or size is given.

Another passage of great beauty, and yet expressed only in general terms, is the famous scene where Dante beholds Matilda

'Plucking one by one
The flowers with which her path was painted,'[1]

and weaving them into garlands of many colours. Here the whole effect produced is a certain

'*incognito e indistinto*'

of brilliant hues.[2]

Even in the Valley of Princes, where we might expect more details, we find no particular kind of flowers given, no differentiation of them by name or description; only an allusion to the various hues which formed a beautiful mass

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[1] *Purg.*, xxviii. 41-42.

[2] This conventional use of certain colours is characteristic of the age. Cf.—

'Wîze, rôte rôsen, blâwe bluomen, grüene gras.'
(*Minnesang's Frühling*, p. 90.)

'Don son vermelh, blanc e vert li brondelh.'
(Mahn, i. 303.)

There are no blue flowers in the *Divina Commedia*, unless Mr. Ruskin is right in his interpretation of the expression *indico legno* (*Purg.*, vii. 74. See *Modern Painters*, III. ch. xiv.).

of colouring, whose brilliancy far outshone that of

> 'Gold and fine silver and crimson and white,
> Rich wood from India, lucid and clear,
> And emeralds fresh broken.'[1]

So, too, the brows of the Apostles in the mystic procession in Purgatory are crowned with flowers of burning red—

> 'Roses and others of vermeil hue.'[2]

There is one exquisite passage in the *Paradiso* where Dante beholds the descent of Christ from on high, accompanied by an infinite number of angels; he compares this shining company, lighted up by a blaze of glory from above, whose source cannot be seen, to a meadow of flowers shone upon by the sun through a rift in the clouds:—

> 'My eyes—themselves in shadow—once beheld
> A ray of sunshine pass through rifted clouds,
> And shine in splendour on a bed of flowers.'[3]

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[1] *Purg.*, vii. 73-75. Did Milton have this passage in mind when he wrote *Paradise Lost*, iv. 700-703.

[2] 'Rose e d'altri fior vermigli' (*Purg.*, xxix. 148).

[3] 'Come a raggio di Sol, che puro mei
Per fratta nube, già prato di fiori
Vider, coperti d'ombra, gli occhi miei.'
(*Par.*, xxiii. 79-81.)

Now in all the preceding examples the effect produced is general and vague, although extremely poetic. Closer observation is seen in the reference to the opening and swelling of buds in spring, and their gradual development of colour, each one according to its nature;[1] and in the lines describing the reviving of flowers by the rays of the morning sun:—

'As little flowers, bent by nocturnal cold,
With closèd leaves, when that the sun begins
To shine, stand up and ope their petals wide.'[2]

When we come to number the specific flowers mentioned in the *Divina Commedia*, we are surprised by their fewness and lack of variety. Those most often mentioned are the lily and the rose. These are the flowers which occur most frequently in the classics; and so common was their use in the Middle Ages, that they stood for flowers in general, and crowded out all others.[3]

Dante has taken their symbolical use from

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[1] 'Come le nostre piante, . . .
. . . . . .
Turgide fansi; e poi si rinnovella
Di suo color ciascuna.'
(*Purg.*, xxxii. 52 ff.)

[2] *Inf.*, ii. 127-129.

[3] Examples of this abound in mediæval poetry.

the Church. Thus he speaks of the Virgin Mary as the

> '. . . Rose in whom the Word Divine
> Was made flesh;'[1]

and the home of the Blessed appears to him in the form of a white rose.[2]

Yet there are some passages which give more realistic touches of the rose, as, for instance, the allusion to the thorn which has been hard and rigid all winter, and which brings forth the rose when the summer comes;[3] and to the sun opening the petals to their fullest extent.[4] The brilliant red rose is alluded to in the lines quoted above, referring to the Apostles crowned with flowers;[5] the softer and lighter shades of colour are evidently meant in the passage where the Roman Empire is mystically represented as an apple-tree, whose blossoms are in colour

> 'Less than roses, and more than violets.'[6]

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[1] *Par.*, xxiii. 73.

[2] 'In forma dunque di candida rosa' (*Par.*, xxxi. 1).

[3] 'Ch'io ho veduto tutto 'l verno prima
Il prun mostrarsi rigido e feroce,
Poscia portar la rosa in su la cima.'
(*Par.*, xiii. 133-135.)

[4] 'Come 'l Sol fa la rosa, quando aperta
Tanto divien quant'ell'ha di possanza.'
(*Par.*, xxii. 56-57.)

[5] *Purg.*, xxix. 148.

[6] *Purg.*, xxxii. 58.

This passage is the only one in which the violet is mentioned, and its delicate colouring is admirably rendered.[1] The lily is only used figuratively,[2] except in two cases—one where the Apostles are said not to have a garland of lilies about their heads,[3] and the other in the line from Vergil, already alluded to.[4]

There is not the slightest evidence in the *Divina Commedia* of a love for simple, wild, uncultivated flowers, those which are found in the fields and along the wayside. The garden was a favourite place in the Middle Ages, and Dante uses only the flowers that grow there.[5]

The background of colours upon which Nature has woven *la gran variazion* of flowers

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[1] Yet not so beautifully as Shakespeare's—

'Violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes' (*W. T.* iv. 4).

[2] 'E quivi son li gigli
Al cui odor si prese 'l buon cammino.'
(*Par.*, xxiii. 74-75.)

Cf. also *Purg.*, vii. 105; and *Par.*, vi. 100 and 111.

[3] '. . . Di gigli
Dintorno al capo' (*Purg.*, xxix. 146, 147).

[4] See p. 111.

[5] There is a striking difference between Dante and Shakespeare and Milton in the number of different kinds of flowers given in their works. Even the troubadours mention the eglantine and the hawthorn, flowers which do not occur in the *Divina Commedia*.

is green, and Dante shows an especial fondness for grass and leaves. The Valley of Princes is carpeted with grassy lawns, green as 'fresh broken emeralds'; the limpid waters of the stream in the Earthly Paradise bend gently the blades of grass that fringe its borders;[1] and the *nobile castello* in which the souls of the great pagan poets and philosophers dwell, lies in the midst of a 'meadow of fresh verdure';[2] and a few lines further on we are shown the 'great spirits on the green enamel.'[3] So, too we have allusions to the green hills of the Casentino,[4] and the river Mincio leaves the *Lago di Garda* and flows through green pastures.[5]

As far as I know, Dante is the first poet to

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[1] *Purg.*, xxviii. 25-27. [2] *Inf.*, iv. 111.

[3] Mr. Ruskin (*Modern Painters*, III. ch. xiv.) has tried to prove that Dante in using the word *smalto* here did not mean grass, but some sort of 'tempering and cooling substance over the dark, metallic, gloomy ground; but yet so hardened by the fire, that it is not any more fresh or living grass, but a smooth, silent, lifeless bed of eternal green.'

It is true that, as he says, *smalto* is used to express hardness in the scene at the gates of Dis (*Inf.*, ix. 52; see also Moore, p. 166); but how shall we interpret the passage referring to Earthly Paradise as the *sommo smalto* (*Purg.*, viii. 114)?

[4] 'Li ruscelletti, che de'verdi colli
Del Casentin' (*Inf.*, xxx. 64-65).

[5] 'E fassi fiume giù pe' verdi paschi' (*Inf.*, xx. 75).

allude to the peculiarly soft and tender green of leaves when first opened. In the eighth canto of the *Purgatorio* he describes the garments of the guardian angels as

'Green as little leaves, but lately born,'

an exquisite and accurate touch.[1] The darker shade of green is referred to in another passage.[2]

Mr. Ruskin has said that Dante had no love for woodland scenery. Woods in the Middle Ages, he says, were wild and savage, and situated on rugged and almost inaccessible mountain tops; they were full of danger to the traveller, and were the haunts of wild beasts and robbers. There is undoubtedly much truth in these remarks; but it certainly does not follow from what we find in the *Divina Commedia* that Dante had an aversion for all kinds of wood scenery. Mr. Ruskin's argument, of course, is based on the description of the *selva oscura* in the first canto of the *Inferno*, which the poet says was so wild and harsh and dense that even

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[1] 'Verdi come fogliette pur mo nate' (*Purg.*, viii. 28).

[2] 'Qual sotto foglie verdi e rami nigri
Sovra suoi freddi rivi l'Alpe porta.'
(*Purg.*, xxxiii. 110-111.)

The figurative use of grass is so common, that it needs no discussion here. For examples, see *Purg.*, xvi. 114; *ibid.*, xi. 115.

the thought of it renewed his fears;[1] and also on that picture of *natura disnaturata*,—the gruesome wood of the suicides.

Now it is not necessary to deduce any definite attitude of Dante's mind toward forest scenery from these examples. It was a common enough metaphor to call anything wild, disorderly, uncultivated, a wood. Dante himself calls Florence a *trista selva*,[2] and further speaks of the *selva di spiriti spessi*.[3] More striking still is a passage we find in a ballade of Charles d'Orléans (1391-1464), which looks like an imitation of Dante, but may be only the employment of a metaphor common to the times.[4] It would seem to follow from what has been said that Dante's use of the *selva oscura* is

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[1] 'Ahi, quanto a dir qual era, è cosa dura
Questa selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte
Che nel pensier rinnova la paura' (*Inf.*, i. 4-6).

[2] *Purg.*, xiv. 64.

[3] *Inf.*, iv. 66. Cf. also *De Vulg. Eloq.*, i. 11; and *Convito*, iv. 24—'Nella selva erronea di questa vita.'

[4] 'En la forest d'ennuyeuse tristesse
Un jour m'avint qu'a par moy cheminoye.
. . . . .
Je respondy que par fortune estoye
Mis en exile en ce bois long temps a
Et qu'a bon droit appeller me povoye
L'omme esgaré qui ne scet ou il va.'
(Bartsch, *Chrest. de l'Anc. frc.*, 453.)
Molière has the same figure in *Le Misanthrope*, v. 1.

purely conventional, and can give no light as to his real feelings. Indeed, the evident joy shown in the *divina foresta spessa e viva*, which crowns the summit of Mount Purgatory, and the tradition that the poet during his life at Ravenna was accustomed to spend hours in the pine forest of Chiassi, might almost lead us to the opposite conclusion to that of Mr. Ruskin.

The truth is that there were then, as now, two kinds of woods: one wild, pathless, the home of wild beasts, and invested with mysterious religious awe as the place which the Romans and Druids of old had made the shrine of their divinities. The other was the pleasant grove with sunny glades and green-vaulted aisles where hunters pursued the deer and lovers walked hand in hand. Thus Vergil speaks of the *densa ferarum tecta*,[1] and surrounds the entrance to Avernus with gloomy woods.[2] Yet he also speaks of the *odoratum lauri nemus*,[3] and says *nobis placeant ante omnia silvae*.[4] In similar manner in the old German Epic, "'Holz und Heide" sind das Bild einsamen, unbe-

[1] *Æn.*, vi. 7-8. Cf. also *stabula alta ferarum*, *ibid.* 179.
[2] *Nemorumque tenebris* (*Æn.*, vi. 238).
[3] *Æn.*, vi. 658.
[4] *Eclogues*, ii. 62.

wohnten Landes.'[1] And yet the Germans thought trees were beautiful, and one of the most common and conventional pictures of natural beauty among the minnesingers is the *grüner Laubwald*, and lovers making a rendezvous under the linden tree, beside the clear waters of a fountain.[2] Dante then only follows the age in giving us both phases of woods, with which he was undoubtedly familiar. Thus the scene in the first canto of the *Inferno*, the trackless wild between Cecina and Corneto,[3] and the wood of suicides represent the harsh and ugly side, while the description of the Earthly Paradise contains what Mr. Ruskin himself has called 'the sweetest bit of wood description in all literature.'[4]

The number of references to trees and leaves in general is not large. We see the dark branches of thick forests among the Alps;[5] the leaves lightly bending before the wind, then regaining their former position;[6] the branches

[1] Lüning, *Die Natur in der Altgerm. und Mittelhochdeutschen Epik*, p. 222.

[2] 'Neben dem Garten spielt der Wald als Schauplatz von Jagden, Reisen und Abentheuern die bedeutendste Rolle in den Epen. Man liebt ihn', etc. (Kuttner, *Das Naturgefühl der Altfranzosen*, p. 63.)

[3] *Inf.*, xiii. 7-9.

[4] *Modern Painters*, vol. III. ch. xiv.

[5] *Purg.*, xxxiii. 110.

[6] *Par.*, xxvi. 85-87.

torn by the storm and hurled to the ground.[1] There is a famous metaphor in the *Inferno*, where the souls flutter down to Charon's boat like withered leaves:—

> 'As one by one the leaves in autumn-tide
> Fall from the tree, until at last the branch
> Restores to earth its spoils.'[2]

This figure is closely imitated from Vergil,[3] and yet Dante has made it entirely original by the power of his own genius. As Mr. Ruskin remarks, 'When Dante describes the spirits falling from the bank of Acheron as dead leaves from a bough, he gives the most perfect image possible of their utter lightness, feebleness, passiveness, and scattering agony of despair.'[4]

There are two trees used symbolically, both in the *Purgatorio*. One is laden with luscious fruits and continually moistened by the spray of a waterfall, and serves to inspire fruitless desires on the part of those who are thus punished for the sin of gluttony.[5] The other is the mystic tree in the Earthly Paradise, which

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[1] *Inf.*, ix. 70.

[2] *Inf.*, iii. 112-114.

[3] 'Quam multa in silvis auctumni frigore primo
Lapsa cadunt folia,' etc. (*Æn.*, vi. 309-310).

[4] *Modern Painters*, vol. III. ch. xiv. Cf. also *Edinburgh Review*, clxxxi. pp. 298, 299.

[5] *Purg.*, xxii. 131 ff.

is supposed to represent the Roman Empire.[1] The latter tree is identical with the Tree of Knowledge, whose fruit was eaten by Adam and Eve,[2] and the former is a shoot of this.

As in the case of flowers, the number of different trees mentioned in the *Divina Commedia* is surprisingly small, and forms a striking contrast with Vergil and even Ovid.[3] The palm[4] and laurel[5] are alluded to conventionally, the pine forest of Chiassi is mentioned,[6] and there is reference to the twenty years it takes for an acorn to become an oak.[7] But this is practically all.

The flora of Italy has changed since Dante's day, the orange[8] and lemon trees have been introduced, and also Indian corn, which adds so much to the beauty of Italian landscapes. The olive, so essentially characteristic of the country, and which forms so large a share of its staple

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[1] Cf. p. 115.

[2] 'Legno è più su, che fu morso da Eva;
E questa pianta si levò da esso.'
(*Purg.*, xxiv. 116, 117.)

[3] *Georg.*, ii. 61, 72; *Met.*, x. 90-105.

[4] *Purg.*, xxxiii. 78; *Par.*, xxxii. 112, etc.

[5] *Par.*, i. 32-33; *Purg.*, xxii. 108. [6] *Purg.*, xxviii. 20.

[7] *Par.*, xxii. 87. Cf. also *Purg.*, xxxi. 71, *cerro*.

[8] The orange has become so identified with Italy that Goethe uses it as typical in the line, 'Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-orangen glühn.'

products, has always been indigenous, although not so cultivated as now. Strangely enough, there is little mention made of it by Dante except in a purely conventional way.[1] The vine, likewise so universally cultivated, is seldom mentioned.

There are a few single references to still other plants,—the ivy clinging to the tree,[2] the pliant nature of the reed, growing in the ooze of the shore, and bending to the constant impact of the waves,[3] and the marine fungus. This latter, which stands for sponges, is introduced in the remarkable discussion of the origin and development of a human being, which seems to adumbrate some of the truths of the youngest of modern sciences, biology.[4] Man, according to Dante, passes through the vegetable and animal stages of life, and the transition state between plant and animal is represented by the marine fungus.

The humbler and more useful kinds of plants

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[1] 'Sovra candido vel cinta d'oliva.'
(*Purg.*, xxx. 31; cf. also *Purg.*, ii. 70.)

[2] *Inf.*, xxv. 58.

[3] 'Laggiù, colà dove la batte l'onda,
Porta de' giunchi sovra 'l molle limo.'
(*Purg.*, i. 101, 102.)
Purg., xxv. 55, 56.

and trees are seldom mentioned. The apple, as we have seen, is symbolically used, and the plum is spoken of metaphorically,[1] while grain is referred to only in the most general manner.[2]

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[1] *Par.*, xxvii. 126.

[2] *Par.*, xiii. 131-132. In the *Convito*, Dante speaks of the fact that plants thrive in certain places and perish if transplanted, iii. 3.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAUNA OF THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

FROM earliest times animals have played an important rôle in literature. Used as metaphor and simile, they are imbedded in the vocabulary of every language, and the origin of fables runs back to the dawn of history.

Of the various kinds of animals, none seem to have been more popular in the Middle Ages than birds; we find them almost invariably introduced with flowers and grass in the descriptions of the return of spring.[1] The *Divina Commedia* also gives evidence of this popularity; and the poet often speaks of them in language so tender, that we cannot doubt that he had a genuine love for them.

Here, however, we find far more evidence of accurate observation than in the case of flowers.

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[1] Paolo Uccello, the Florentine painter, received his name on account of his fondness for birds.

The variety of birds mentioned is comparatively large, and many of the details given are minute and exact. Of course, metaphors drawn from this source are common. Thus Lucifer is said to have wings such as were befitting so great a bird;[1] and in the fifth *Malebolgia*, Farfarello is called by Barbariccia, *malvagio uccello*;[2] while the angel who guides the souls from the mouth of the Tiber over the sea to Purgatory, 'beating the air with his eternal plumes,' is alluded to as *l'uccel divino*.[3] One of the strangest of the metaphors in the *Divina Commedia* is found in the *Paradiso*, Canto xxvii., where Saint Peter, inflamed with righteous indignation, rebukes the degenerate clergy, while all the heavens become red at his words. To describe this change of colour in the face of the saint, the poet says—

> 'And such in his appearance he became
> As Jupiter might be, if he and Mars
> Were birds and changed their plumes.'[4]

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[1] *Inf.*, xxxiv. 47.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxii. 96.

[3] *Purg.*, ii. 38.

[4] A similar figure is used of stars in Wolfram von Eschenbach. (See Lüning, p. 68.)

Besides these figures, there are many others drawn from wings, feathers, and the act of flying. The beard of Cato is called 'oneste piume' (*Purg.*, i. 42); we hear of the wings of desire (*Par.*, xv. 72; *Purg.*, iv. 28); Reason has her wings too short (*Par.*, ii.

But leaving aside all conventional references, enough remains to prove that Dante loved, and had more or less closely observed the habits of birds. Thus we see them rising from the river, chattering as if rejoicing together;[1] and we have a long and beautiful description, illustrative of the parental instinct—

'Just as a bird among the lovèd leaves
Broods o'er the nest where sleep her tender young,
When night's dark shadows hide all things from view,
Who yearns to see again their longed-for looks,
And sally forth to seek their food,—a task
In which all heavy labour seems a joy,—
And who upon the open branch forestalls
The day, and waits with ardent love the sun,
Gazing with steady eyes to see the dawn.'[2]

The well-known phenomenon of the migration of birds is alluded to in several passages. When the winter approaches, they fly to the shores of the Nile,[3] or the sands of

57); the hours are described as bending *in giuso l'ale* (*Purg.*, ix. 9); the utmost reach of the eyes is described in the words, '*E quanto l'occhio mio potea trar d'ale*' (*Purg.*, x. 25); the spend-thrift opens the 'wings of his hands' too wide (*Purg.*, xxii. 43-44); and foolish motives bend the 'wings of our affections' (*Par.*, xi. 3).

[1] 'E come augelli surti di riviera,
Quasi congratulando' (*Par.*, xviii. 73-74).

[2] *Par.*, xxiii. 1-9.

[3] 'Come gli augei che vernan lungo 'l Nilo' (*Purg.*, xxiv. 64).

Africa.[1] In another place we see the hunter (who, according to the poet, wastes his life in this pursuit) watching for the birds among the green branches.[2] But the most beautiful passage of all occurs in the description of the Earthly Paradise, where the boughs of the trees, though gently bent by the winds, did not cause the little birds perched upon their summits to cease the songs with which they welcomed the soft breezes, keeping time with the murmuring of the leaves.[3]

The birds most frequently mentioned are the falcon and the hawk. This is due undoubtedly to the fact that hawking was a favourite pastime with the knights of the Middle Ages,[4] and

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[1] 'Poi come gru, ch'alle montagne Rife
Volasser parte, e parte invêr l' arene.'
(*Purg.*, xxvi. 43-44.)
This passage is a puzzling one, for the same family of birds do not fly in contrary directions. Cf. Blanc: 'Unmöglich aber kann von derselben Vögelgattung zu gleicher Zeit, ein Theil die Kälte, ein anderer die Hitze aufsuchen,' quoted by Scartazzini *in loc.*

[2] *Purg.*, xxiii. 1 ff.

[3] *Ibid.* xxviii. 10 ff. Almost all recent Italian commentators interpret *ore* as above. (See Scartazzini *in loc.*)

[4] Treatises on falconry are still extant—one by the Provençal Daudes de Prades (Diez, *Poesie der Troubadours*, p. 198), and others by Emperor Frederick II. and Albertus Magnus (Schultz, i. 368).

Dante was evidently familiar with all the details of the sport.[1]

In the *Divina Commedia* we see in one vivid passage the falcon after a long absence, in which he has vainly sought for prey, weary, angry, disappointed, returning slowly, with many circles in the air, to its master, who gives vent to his disappointment as he sees the bird descend.[2] In another passage we see it dashing after the duck, which escapes by plunging under the water, while the falcon only saves itself from falling in by a sudden upward swoop.[3] In the second terrace of Purgatory, where the Envious are punished, we find an allusion to the method of taming hawks, by sewing their eyelids together.[4] Again we see the falcon,

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[1] In his use of these birds he differs from the Old German literature, where the hawk was the symbol of freedom, and from Vergil, who gives only the wild and savage instincts.

[2] 'Come 'l falcon ch'è stato assai sull 'ali,
Che, senza veder logoro o uccello
Fa dire al falconiere: Oimè tu cali!'
(*Inf.*, xvii. 127 ff.)

The same idea is expressed in the word *logoro*, applied to the heavens in *Purg.*, xix. 62.

[3] *Inf.*, xxii. 130-132.

[4] 'Un fil di ferro il ciglio fora
E cuce sì, come a sparvier selvaggio
Si fa, però che queto non dimora.'
(*Purg.*, xiii. 70-72.)

moving its head from side to side, flapping its wings, and showing other signs of satisfaction at being free from its hood, which its master has just removed.[1]

To Dante the eagle was the king of birds,[2] as the lion was the king of animals. We find no evidence of direct observation of the appearance and habits of these majestic birds.[3] In

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Shakespeare has a similar reference in the fine passage :—

'Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude, imperious surge,' etc.

(2 *Henry IV.*, iii. 1.)

He has likewise many other figures drawn from falconry.

[1] 'Quasi falcon, che uscendo del cappello
Muove la testa, e con l'ale s'applaude,
Voglia mostrando, e facendosi bello.'

(*Par.*, xix. 34-36.)

This figure is used three times by Boccaccio.

Dante distinguishes between the various kind of hawks—the *astore* (*Purg.*, viii. 104), the old French *ostoir*, the *sparviere* (*Inf.*, xxii. 139), old French *espervier*, and the *falcone*, by which term the trained bird is usually meant. Further references are *Purg.*, xix. 64-66; *Par.*, xviii. 45, 'Com' occhio segue suo falcon volando.' This is exactly the same as Vergil, 'Quantum acie possent oculi servare sequentum' (*Æn.*, vi. 200). For similar figures in old French, see Kuttner, p. 18; in Provençal, Bartsch, 268.

[2] 'Li aigles est reis des oisels' (*Le Bestiaire de Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 249).

[3] Yet Dante may have seen them, as they were often kept at public expense (see Burckhardt, ii. 11). The Tower of Hunger (*Inf.*, xxxiii. 22) is called *muda*, because it was here that the eagle was kept by the town during the moulting season.

metaphors and symbols it is frequently used. Thus Homer is

> 'That lord of the most lofty song
> Who o'er the others as an eagle soars';[1]

the tyrant of Ravenna is called *l'aquila da Polenta*;[2] and the *santo uccello* stands likewise for the Roman Empire,[3] and is used symbolically of Lucia, or illuminating grace, in the passage where Dante dreams that he is caught up to heaven by an eagle with golden feathers.[4]

In striking contrast to the vagueness of the references to the eagle are the minute details given of the habits of storks, with which the poet was evidently well acquainted. These birds are sociable, and commonly build their nests on house-tops, chimneys, and church spires. Brunetto Latini alludes to this habit of theirs, and to-day they are a familiar sight on the gabled roofs of some of the old European

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[1] *Inf.*, iv. 95-96. [2] *Ibid.* xxvii. 41. [3] *Purg.*, xxxii. 112.

[4] *Purg.*, ix. 20 ff. Signor Cipolla finds in the line, 'Aquila si non gli (sun) s'affisse unquanco' (*Par.*, i. 48), proof of Dante's observation; but the references to the strength of the eagle's eyes are very common in mediæval literature (cf. B. Latini, *Li Trésor*, p. 196; also Reinsch, *Le Bestiaire*, p. 250):—

> 'Ses elz afiche en la luor
> Del soleil et tant i esgarde.'

cities. Very attractive and touching are some of the pictures that Dante gives, such as that of the mother stork hovering above the nest, while the little ones, who have just been fed, look up into her face;[1] or the young fledgling, making its first attempt at flying, raising its wings, and then overcome with fear, dreading to leave the security of the nest, lowering them again.[2] None but a very close observer of the habits of birds could so perfectly render this scene. The peculiar noise made by storks is used to describe the chattering of the teeth of the souls fixed in the frozen lake of Cocytus.[3]

There are isolated references to still other birds; the cranes flying in a long line through the air in their migration to the south;[4] doves quietly engaged in picking here and there the grain, and then suddenly startled and flying

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1 'Poi c' ha pasciuto la cicogna i figli,
E come quei, ch' è pasto la rimira.'
(*Par.*, xix. 92-93.)

2 'E quale il cogognin, che leva l'ala
Per voglia di volare, e non s'attenta
D'abbandonar lo nido, e giù la cala.'
(*Purg.*, xxv. 10-12.)

3 'Mettendo i denti in nota di cicogna' (*Inf.*, xxxii. 36).

4 'E come i gru van cantando lor lai
Facendo in aer di sè lunga riga' (*Inf.*, v. 46-47).
Cf. also *Purg.*, xxvi. 43-45.

away;[1] the swan sailing majestically with open wings;[2] the lark shooting up into the sky, at first singing, and then silent in its ecstasy;[3] the migration of the starlings;[4] and the duck plunging under water to escape the hawk.[5]

The most beautiful of all these pictures of bird-life, that in which the coming of Francesca is compared to the flight of doves, contains certain reminiscences of Vergil, although Dante must have seen and noted what he so lovingly describes:—

> 'As doves lured onward by their own desires,
> With open wings and firm, to the sweet nest,
> Fly through the air.'[6]

The most common birds used by the troubadours and minnesingers are the nightingale

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[1] 'Come, quando cogliendo biada o loglio
Gli colombi adunati alla pastura
. . . . . .
Subitamente lasciano star l'esca,' etc.
(*Purg.*, ii. 124-129.)

[2] 'Con l'ale aperte, che parean di cigno' (*Purg.*, xix. 46).

[3] 'Qual lodoletta, che in aere si spazia
Prima cantando, e poi tace contenta
Dell'ultima dolcezza che la sazia' (*Par.*, xx. 73-75).

[4] *Inf.*, v. 40-41.

[5] 'Non altrimenti l'anitra di botto,
Quando 'l falcon s'appressa, giù s'attuffa.'
(*Inf.*, xxii. 130-131.)

[6] *Inf.*, v. 82-84.

and the lark, which are universally used as the messengers of spring and love. It is rather singular that Dante has so little reference to these birds. There is one very beautiful passage, already referred to on the opposite page, describing the upward flight of the lark, but the nightingale is only glancingly alluded to as Procne who was changed into the bird that most delights to sing.[1] A realistic picture of the crows is given awaking in the morning and shaking their plumes chilled by the night.[2]

Domestic animals, with the exception of those necessary for sustenance, were not so common in the Middle Ages as in modern times. In Germany the ancient Teutons show a keen appreciation for horses, and even for dogs; but Dante betrays no sign of affection for these friends of man.

In our own day the deep interest manifested for man as man, poor, suffering, ignorant, has undoubtedly awakened a similar interest in

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1 'Dell' empiezza di lei, che mutò forma
Nell' uccel che a cantar più si diletta.'
(*Purg.*, xvii. 19-20.)
The swallow is similarly referred to as Philomela (*Purg.*, ix. 13-15).

2 'Le pole insieme, al cominciar del giorno
Si muovono a scaldar le fredde piume.'
(*Par.*, xxi. 35-36.)

animals—an interest not only sympathetic, but artistic.[1]

Strangely enough, Dante refers to horses but four times in the *Divina Commedia*, and then it is only in the vaguest of terms. Italy is compared to an untamed horse without a saddle, although the word *cavallo* is not employed ;[2] similarly in the expression

'Drawn by the tail of a beast,'[3]

reference is made to the death of Corso Donati, who, flying from his enemies, fell from his horse, and was dragged along with his foot in the stirrup, until being overtaken, he was slain. The word *cavallo*, singular and plural, is mentioned only twice—once of the fiery steeds of Elijah,[4] and the other time of the wooden horse of Troy.[5] There is not a single detail to show an appreciation of the good qualities of the

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[1] The pictures of animal life of Sir Edwin Landseer are, of course, too well known to need more than mention. In poetry, Burns's *Twa Dogs* and Matthew Arnold's *Geist* may stand as an example of how modern poets look on domestic animals.

[2] 'Che val, perchè ti racconciasse 'l freno
Giustinïano, se la sella è vota?' (*Purg.*, vi. 88, 89.)

[3] *Ibid.*, xxiv. 83, 84.

[4] 'Vide 'l carro d'Elia al dipartire
Quando i cavalli al cielo erti levôrsi.'
(*Inf.*, xxvi. 35, 36.)

[5] 'Ricordìti, spergiuro, del cavallo' (*Inf.*, xxx. 118).

horse, its intelligence and strength and gracefulness.[1]

The dog, however, is mentioned a number of times, but only the disagreeable side of his nature is given. We see snarling curs, making more noise than is warranted by their size;[2] the hound hunting the wild-boar;[3] the mastiff rushing out at the robber;[4] and still other dogs cruelly tearing the hare,[5] barking and yelping, and then becoming suddenly still as food is thrown to them.[6]

Two pictures are especially vivid—one of which may have been a matter of personal

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[1] In the old German and French epic poetry the horse is looked on as the faithful friend of its master (see Kuttner, p. 51). So, too, Vergil says of the horse of Mezentius:—

'Hoc decus illi,
Hoc solamen erat, bellis hoc victor abibat
Omnibus.' (*Æn.*, x. 858-860.)

Cf. also *Ibid.* xi. 599-601, and Milton, *Par. Lost*, iv. 858.

[2] 'Botoli truova poi, . . .
Ringhiosi più che non chiede lor possa.'
(*Purg.*, xiv. 46-47.)

A contemptuous allusion to the Aretines.

[3] *Inf.*, xiii. 112-114, and 124-126.

[4] 'E mai non fu mastino sciolto
Con tanta fretta a seguitar lo furo' (*Inf.*, xxi. 44, 45).

[5] *Inf.*, xxiii. 17, 18.

[6] 'Quale quel cane, ch' abbaiando agugna,
E si racqueta poi che 'l pasto morde,
Chè solo a divorarlo intende e pugna.'
(*Inf.*, vi. 28-30.)

experience to the wandering poet, forced himself to beg often for food and shelter.

'With that same rage and fury which the dogs
Show, when they leap upon the mendicant,
Who sudden stops and begs from where he stands.'[1]

The other picture shows dogs in summer, tormented by fleas and hornets and flies, and snapping and pawing to keep them off.[2]

Besides the above, we have other more vague and conventional references; the wretched sinners in the frozen lake of Cocytus have their faces 'made dog-like by cold;'[3] Bocca barks,[4] and Ugolino gnaws the skull of Ruggieri with teeth as hard and strong as those of a dog.[5] In the dream which the unfortunate father has in the Tower of Hunger at Pisa, he saw himself and his children chased to the mountains by 'gaunt dogs';[6] and, finally,

[1] *Inf.*, xxi. 67-69.

[2] 'Non altrimenti fan di state i cani
Or col ceffo, or col piè, quando son morsi
O da pulci, o da mosche, o da tafani.'
(*Inf.*, xvii. 49-51.)

[3] 'Poscia vid' io mille visi cagnazzi
Fatti per freddo.' (*Inf.*, xxxii. 70, 71.)

[4] *Inf.*, xxxii. 108.

[5] 'Riprese 'l teschio misero co' denti,
Che furo all' osso, come d'un can, forti.'
(*Inf.*, xxxiii. 77, 78.)

[6] *Inf.*, xxxiii. 31.

Vergil, in the Stygian marsh, repulses Filippo Argenti from the boat with the bitter words, 'Away, yonder with the other dogs.'[1]

The different kinds of cattle and the details of rural and pastoral life naturally find some expression in the *Divina Commedia*, though not so frequently as one might expect, considering the poet's thorough acquaintance with Vergil. Of course, there are many conventional touches, metaphors, and references to common animals, such as are found in all literatures. Of this nature are the well-known peculiarities of sheep and lamb, their innocence, simplicity,[2] and blind following of their leader. Yet there are passages which paint scenes which Dante must have seen with his own eyes.[3] How vivid, for instance, is the following picture, common enough, it is true, but painted with admirable truth and accuracy:—

'As one by one, by twos and threes, the sheep
Forth from the sheepfold come, and all the rest

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[1] 'Via costà con gli altri cani' (*Inf.*, viii. 42).

[2] 'Sì che le pecorelle che non sanno' (*Par.*, xxix. 106).

[3] 'E i' ne vidi già molte in un pozzo saltare, per una che dentro vi saltò, forse, credendo di saltare uno muro; non ostante che il pastore, piangendo, e gridando, colle braccia e col petto dinanzi si parava' (*Convito*, i. 11).

Stand timid with their eyes and nose bent down,
And what the first one does the others do,
Huddling together if it stops, nor know,
Poor, gentle, silly beasts, the reason why.'[1]

We see, in other passages, the shepherd, at early morn, taking his staff and driving the sheep to pasture;[2] or spending the night in the open air, beside his sleeping flock, to guard them against the attack of wolf or lion.[3] There is a similar and equally beautiful scene to this in the *Purgatorio*; only here, instead of sheep and shepherd, we find goats and goatherd. The time is the hour of noon, and man and beast are resting in the shade, while the sun beats down upon the rocks about them; there is a delightful atmosphere of coolness and repose about the whole scene:—

'Like goats that boldly on the mountain tops
Have leaped and played all morning, when the hour
Of noon arrives, stand quiet in the shade
And ruminate, safe from the fiery sun,

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[1] *Purg.*, iii. 79-84. Cf. Note 3 on preceding page.

[2] *Inf.*, xxiv. 14, 15.

[3] 'E quale i mandrïan che fuori alberga,
Lungo 'l peculio suo queto pernotta,
Guardando perchè fiera non lo sperga.'
(*Purg.*, xxvii. 82-84.)

The while the goatherd leans upon his staff,
And in this attitude stands guard.'[1]

In another place the rock-climbing propensities of goats are alluded to, in an expression denoting a steep path among the rocks,[2] and the sinners in Cocytus are told that it would have been better for them had they been *pecore o zebe*.[3]

In similar manner, the allusions to oxen are both general and particular, the latter giving glimpses of rural life in Dante's day. Thus we find the oxen yoked together and moving side by side;[4] we see that habit of theirs, which is more familiar than elegant;[5] the wild rage and terror of the bull is pictured, struck with a mortal blow, leaping forward and plunging blindly hither and thither;[6] and finally, we see the pathetic fate of all domestic animals which

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[1] *Purg.*, xxvii. 76-81.

[2] 'Lo scoglio sconcio ed erto,
Che sarebbe alle capre duro varco.'
(*Inf.*, xix. 131-132.)

[3] *Inf.*, xxxii. 15. Of course, this is a Biblical reference.

[4] 'Di pari, come buoi che vanno a giogo' (*Purg.*, xii. 1).

[5] 'Come bue che il naso lecchi' (*Inf.*, xvii. 75).

[6] 'Quale quel toro, che si slaccia in quella
C'ha ricevuto lo colpo mortale,
Che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella.'
(*Inf.*, xii. 22-24.)

have outlived their usefulness and are killed out of the way.[1]

Swine are alluded to proverbially in several passages.[2] Forming a vivid contrast to the idyllic beauty of the scene, referred to above, in which the timid sheep leave the fold one by one, is the passage describing the hog breaking from its sty.[3] We find further references to the tusks of the wild boar,[4] and to the noise and confusion of a boar hunt in the forest,—the barking of the dogs, the cries of the hunter, and the crashing of the branches that stand in the way.[5]

The various kinds of wild animals do not play so important a part in the *Divina Commedia* as in Homer and Vergil. Civilisation in

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1 'Poscia gli ancide come antica belva' (*Purg.*, xiv. 62).

2 'Di questo ingrassa il porco Sant' Antonio
Ed altri assai, che son peggio che porci.
(*Par.*, xxix. 124-125.)
Quanti si tengono or lassù gran regi,
Che qui staranno come porci in brago.'
(*Inf.*, viii. 49-50.)

3 'Correvano a quel modo
Che'l porco, quando del porcil si schiude.'
(*Inf.*, xxx. 26-27.)

4 *Ibid.* xxii. 56.

5 'Similmente a colui, che venire
Sente 'l porco e la caccia alla sua posta,
Ch'ode le bestie, e le frasche stormire.'
(*Inf.*, xiii. 112-114.)

Dante's day had grown, there were more cities and less unbroken forests. Yet there were still wolves in the mountains and woods and even cities.[1] The fear of Dante in the first canto of the *Inferno*, where he found his path closed by a lion, a panther, and a wolf, may not be entirely poetical, but reminiscential of actual experience, at least as regards wolves, in lonely and savage places. It is probable, however, that he never saw a lion;[2] all his references to it are conventional, its open character in contrast to the slyness of the fox,[3] its majestic appearance, which is rendered with sculpturesque beauty in the well-known line referring to Sordello—

'A guisa di leon, quando si posa.[4]

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[1] 'Ces animaux rôdent par longues bandes dans les bois et dans les plaines, pénètrent la nuit au sein des villes, et dans les premières années du xv^e^ siècle se promenèrent en plein Paris.' (Rosières, *Hist. de la Société Française au Moyen Âge*, vol. ii. pp. 425-426).

[2] Unless one of those kept at public expense. (Cf. Burckhardt, ii. 11-12; and Schultz, i. 349.)

[3] 'L'opere mie
Non furon leonine, ma di volpe.'
(*Inf.*, xxvii. 74-75.)

[4] *Purg.*, vi. 66. Of course, those passages where the lion is mentioned as forming part of various coats-of-arms (the Ordelaffi, *Inf.*, xxvii. 45; Gianfigliazzi, *Inf.*, xvii. 60; Spain, *Par.*, xii. 54; Mainardo Pagani, *Inf.*, xxvii. 50) need no discussion.

The attributes usually applied to the wolf—fierceness, hunger, rapacity, cruelty—are frequently mentioned by Dante. As has already been remarked, it is probable that the poet had a personal acquaintance with these fierce beasts, and yet it is by no means a necessary inference from his use of them. All the phases of character and habits he gives coincide with those we find in the Bible, Vergil, Bestiaries, and the Beast Epic. This is likewise true of the fox,[1] whose sharpness was so universally appreciated in the Middle Ages, that a cycle of romances clustered about him as about Arthur and Charlemagne.[2]

The deer is mentioned but once, and that in a general, proverbial way.[3]

Snakes naturally play an important rôle in a poem full of Christian symbolism. Dante undoubtedly was influenced in his use of them by the Bible, Ovid, Lucan,[4] and Brunetto Latini.

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[1] Cf. *Purg.*, xiv. 53; *ibid.* xxxii. 119; *Inf.*, xxvii. 75.

[2] The references to these animals being so conventional, I have not thought it necessary to do more than allude to them here. The wolf has been treated more at length in the chapter on the Conventional Treatment of Nature in the *Divina Commedia.*

[3] 'Sì si starebbe un cane intra duo dame' (*Par.*, iv. 6).

[4] Cf., for instance, the various species given by Dante (*Inf.*,

In the terrible scene, which occurs in the seventh of the Malebolge, where the poet is witness to the double transformation of snakes into men, and men into snakes, there is a long and minute description of this process, ending with the words—

> 'The soul that had been changed into a beast
> Down through the valley fled with many a hiss,
> And after him the other, spitting as he spoke.'[1]

Signor Bianchi is full of admiration for the close observation of Nature, shown, as he thinks, by these references to the hissing of serpents and spitting of men. Yet his remarks form an excellent example of the danger of generalising in such matters. Ovid has exactly the same touch in a similar scene, from which Dante took many details of his transformation of men into serpents, and which without doubt suggested to him the words given above.[2]

The references to frogs, however, produce the impression of close observation. This is

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xxiv. 85-87), with *Pharsalia*, ix. 706-721 (quoted by Scartazzini *in loc.*).

[1] *Inf.*, xxv. 136-138.

[2] *Met.*, iv. 576-589, especially the lines—

> 'Nec verba loquenti
> Sufficiunt, quotiensque aliquos parat edere questus
> Sibilat.'

true of the passage where they are described as croaking with nose protruding from the water; with an accurate touch, the season of the year when this is most common is given.[1] Again we see them resting their snouts on the edge of a ditch, but with feet and body hidden under water,[2] or scattering in all directions at the approach of a snake.[3]

In the single reference to snails, a very realistic description is given. The transformation of a man into a snake is being described, and the process had proceeded so far that the head was like that of a snake, with the exception of the ears, which now finally are drawn in, just as the snail draws in its horns.[4]

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1 'E come a gracidar si sta la rana
Con muso fuor dell' acqua, quando sogna
Di spigolar sovente la villana.'
(*Inf.*, xxxii. 31-33.)

2 'E come all'orlo dell' acqua d'un fosso
Stan gli ranocchi pur col muso fuori,
Sì che celano i piedi e l'altro grosso.'
(*Inf.*, xxii. 25-27.)

3 'Come le rane innanzi alla nimica
Biscia per l'acqua si dileguan tutte.'
(*Ibid.* ix. 76-77.)

There is frequent mention of frogs in the troubadours.

4 'E gli orecchi ritira per la testa,
Come face le corna la lumaccia.'
(*Inf.*, xxv. 131-132.)

Signor Scartazzini calls this a *bellissima similitudine.*

The old tradition concerning the beaver is alluded to in the passage where it is described standing, '*tra li Tedeschi lurchi*,' with tail in water, in order to catch fish.[1] We have further reference to the timidity of the hare,[2] and to the monkey as the typical imitative animal;[3] the elephant and whales are monstrosities;[4] the mole is blind because of the pellicle over its eyes;[5] the otter is pulled out of the water with streaming hair;[6] and the lizard, during the intense heat of the dog days, flashes like a streak of lightning across the road, seeking from hedge to hedge a little protection from the burning sun.[7]

Dante may, or may not, have been a devotee of the art of angling,[8] but that he knew the habits of fish in their native element cannot be

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[1] *Inf.*, xvii. 21-22. Dicitur de bivero animali, quod cum cauda piscatur mittendo ipsam in aquam et ipsam agitando, ex cujus pinguedine resultant guttae ad modum olei, etc., Petr. Dantis. (Cf. Scartazzini, *in loc.*)

[2] *Inf.*, xxiii. 18.

[3] *Inf.*, xxix. 139. [4] *Inf.*, xxxi. 52. [5] *Purg.*, xvii. 3.

[6] 'E trassel su, che mi parve una lontra' (*Inf.*, xxii. 36).

[7] 'Come 'l ramarro, sotto la gran fersa
De' dì canicular cangiando siepe,
Folgore par se la via attraversa.'
(*Inf.*, xxv. 79-81.)

[8] Fishing was less popular in the Middle Ages than hunting. Cf. 'Conciossiacosachè il pescare sia sotto l'arte della venagione' (*Convito*, iv. 9; cf. also Schultz, i. p. 367).

doubted. Very true and very beautiful is the figure he uses to describe the disappearance of the spirits in the flame that purges the souls of the licentious in Purgatory:—

'As a fish through the water descends to the bottom.'[1]

Who has not in his idle hours stood watching the fish, and seen them stream towards a crumb thrown into the water? How could this picture be better rendered than in the following lines:—

'As through the pure and tranquil water, stream
The fish toward that which in the pool is thrown,
Esteeming it their food.'[2]

The smallest members of the animal kingdom do not escape the observing eye of the poet, and such unpoetical insects as the flea, the gnat, and the fly are brought into use. By means of these latter he has accurately given the time of day and season of the year in one line, where showing us the farmer lying on the

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[1] '. . . Disparve per lo fuoco
Come per l'acqua il pesce andando al fondo.'
(*Purg.*, xxvi. 134-135.)

[2] *Par.*, v. 100-103. The more homely and practical use of fish is seen in the following lines:—
'Come coltel di scardova le scaglie,
O d'altro pesce che più larghe l'abbia.'
(*Inf.*, xxix. 83-84.)

hillside of a summer evening, looking down upon the valley alight with fire-flies,[1] he says the time was that

'When the fly yields to the gnat.'[2]

Those pests of dogs, the flea and hornet, are referred to in a passage already given, where the dog is seen snapping and scratching in agony.[3] The butterfly was symbolical, during the Middle Ages, of the death and resurrection[4] of the body. The various phases of its development are referred to by Dante—the caterpillar state[5] and the chrysalis state—the latter, referring to the cocoon of the silkworm, furnishing a figure for the souls in Paradise, swathed in light;[6] in one passage backsliding Christians are compared to insects in a state of arrested development.[7]

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[1] 'Vede lucciole giù per la vallea' (*Inf.*, xxvi. 29).

[2] 'Come la mosca cede alla zanzara' (*Inf.*, xxvi. 28; cf. Milton, *Par. Reg.*, iv. 15).

[3] See p. 138.

[4] In ancient monuments the soul is often represented by a butterfly. So Dante:—

'. . . noi siam vermi
Nati a formar l'angelica farfalla.'
(*Purg.*, x. 124-125.)

[5] See the above note.

[6] *Par.*, viii. 54.

[7] 'Voi siete quasi entomata in difetto,
Si come verme, in cui formazione falla.'
(*Purg.*, x. 128, 129.)

In his use of bees Dante was probably more or less influenced by his predecessors. Vergil devoted one of the four books of the *Georgics* to a discussion of bee culture; and in the description of the building of Carthage, in the *Æneid*, there is a well-known metaphor drawn from them.[1] So, too, Lucretius, Lucan, Ovid, and others have made this industrious insect the subject of figures. Yet there are certain touches in the *Divina Commedia* which seem to prove that Dante's use of them was not entirely conventional. In the wonderful passage where he stands contemplating

'La forma general di Paradiso,'[2]

he saw the Blessed in the shape of a great white rose on the banks of the river of light; and the white-robed angels, with wings of gold and faces of flame, as they fly unceasingly back and forth from seats of the Saints to the effulgent river, are compared to bees, following their inborn instinct to make honey,[3] flying from flower to flower, burying themselves in the chalice, and then rising heavily to carry

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[1] *Æn.*, i. 430-436.

[2] *Par.*, xxxi. 52.

[3] '. . . Sì come studio in ape
Di far lo mèle' (*Purg.*, xviii. 58, 59).

their burden to their hives.[1] In another passage their buzzing noise is compared to the noise of the distant waterfall.[2]

The wasp is referred to twice: once in the *Inferno*, where the ignoble souls of those,

> 'To God displeasing, and his enemies,'

are stung by flies and wasps, while the tears and blood which fall to the ground at their feet are gathered up by foul worms;[3] and again, the dragon in the Earthly Paradise draws in its tail as a wasp its sting.[4]

The same instinct which is so wonderful in bees, is still more so in ants. In all times men have stood amazed at the seeming intelligence displayed by these minute animals; fables and Bestiaries relate marvellous stories of them, which, if not so true, are at least as interesting as those told by Sir John Lubbock in our own days. Dante himself must have seen the

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1 'Sì come schiera d'api, che s'infiora[1]
Una fiata, ed altra si ritorna
Là dove il suo lavoro s'insapora.'
(*Par.*, xxxi. 7-9.)

2 'Simile a quel, che l'arnie fanno, rombo' (*Inf.*, xvi. 3).

3 *Inf.*, iii. 65-66.

4 'E, come vespa che ritragge l'ago' (*Purg.*, xxxii. 133).

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1 Cf. Vergil, *Floribus insidunt variis* (*Aen.*, vi. 708).

picture he so strikingly describes in the following lines :—

'Thus when their dark bands meet, the ants
Their muzzles put together, to inquire,
Perchance, their way, or mutually tell their luck.'[1]

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1 'Così per entro loro schiera bruna
S'ammusa l'una con l'altra formica,
Forse a spiar lor via e lor fortuna.'
(*Purg.*, xxvi. 34-36.)

CHAPTER IX

THE HEAVENLY BODIES

DURING all ages of the world's history, man has seemed to be irresistibly attracted toward the contemplation of the starry heavens.[1] Advanced civilisation to a certain extent tends to lessen this impulse. There is but little or no opportunity in the crowded streets of a modern city to look toward the sky; the glare of gas and the brilliant light of electricity completely efface the softer light of the stars. The early pastoral people, living, as they did, in the open air, spending the night in watching their flocks, were brought into close communion with those hands upon the celestial timepiece by which

[1] Alexander von Humboldt, in his *Views of Nature*, speaks of 'that inherent impulse, which for thousands of years has glowed in the breast of man, directs his mind, by a mysterious presentiment of his destiny, towards the celestial orbs, which in undisturbed harmony pursue their ancient and eternal course' (p. 21, Bohn's edition).

men told the times and seasons, and by which the mariner was guided over the sea.

This state of things was not over in the Middle Ages; in the *Divina Commedia* we find a beautiful picture of the shepherd watching his flock by night, while the clear stars shone overhead;[1] we see Ulysses and his companions in that last *folle volo* of theirs, steering their frail bark over the unknown waters of the Western Ocean by the light of the stars;[2] while the references to their occult influence on the fate of man are numerous.[3]

There can be no doubt that Dante had a deep love for the starry heavens; the exquisite descriptions he gives of them, and the language he uses in speaking of them, would be proof enough of this without anything else.[4] But he

[1] 'Poco potea parer lì del di fuori;
Ma per quel poco vedev' io le stelle
Di lor solere e più chiare e maggiori.'
(*Purg.*, xxvii. 88-90.)

[2] *Inf.*, xxvi. 127-129. Cf. also *Purg.*, xxx. 5, 6, where the Ursa Major is alluded to as guiding the sailor. Yet Dante knew of the compass, recently discovered in Italy. Cf. *Par.*, xii. 29, 'che l'ago alla stella.'

[3] See p. 156.

[4] As, for instance, such expressions as—
'Lo bel pianeta . . .
Faceva tutto rider l'oriente' (*Purg.*, i. 19-20).
'Dipingono 'l ciel' (*Par.*, xxiii. 27), and '*l'affocato riso* of Mars' (*Par.*, xiv. 86).

tells us definitely in the *Convito* that many nights when others were asleep, he gazed fixedly on what he calls the tabernacle of his love;[1] in his pathetic yet noble letter to a Florentine friend, he cries out, 'And what then, can I not behold the mirrors of the sun and stars everywhere;'[2] and in both the *Divina Commedia* and the *Convito* he rebukes others for refusing to lift their eyes to the stars on high.[3]

But we must remember that the stars meant more to Dante than they do to us. Plato believed that the soul went back to the stars at death;[4] and Dante, acting on this hint, has made of them the home of the Redeemed, mysteriously present here as well as in the great White Rose in the Empyrean. In Mars are the spirits of Christian warriors and martyrs; in the sun are the great theologians and philosophers; in Jupiter, the upright and just; and so on with the other heavens.

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[1] *Convito*, iii. 1; in *Ibid.* iii. 9, he says his eyes were once so weakened by reading that the stars appeared blurred to him.

[2] *Epistola* ix., Moore, p. 414.

[3] *Purg.*, xiv. 148-151, and *Convito*, iii. 5.

[4] Cf. Vergil—

'Sed viva volare
Sideris in numerum atque alto succedere caelo.'
(*Georg.* iv. 226, 227.)

Dante alludes to Plato's doctrine in *Par.*, iv. 23, 24.

Again, the stars are incorruptible;[1] they are the media by which the influence of God is transmitted to earth.[2] In common with the rest of the Middle Ages, Dante believed in the influence of the stars on the fate of man, and we find in the *Divina Commedia* many references to this belief. Thus Brunetto Latini tells the poet that if he 'follow his star, he cannot fail of a glorious harbour';[3] and Dante alludes to his own lofty genius as being due to the influence of a good star or *miglior cosa*.[4] But it is only the material and mortal part of man's nature which is affected by the stars; the will and the reason are left free to act for themselves, and to contend against unfavourable stellar influences.[5]

Dante's love for the stars was largely scientific; he knew thoroughly the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, which forms the framework of the whole structure of the *Paradiso*. We find constant (and accurate) allusions to the constellations, their various shapes and positions in the heavens; while the hour of the day and the season of the year are often referred to in terms

[1] 'Ut patet de cælo et elementis, quorum quidem illud incorruptibile, illa vero corruptibilia sunt' (*Epist.* x., Moore, p. 418).

[2] *Par.*, ii. 121-123; also *Convito*, ii. 7.

[3] *Inf.*, xv. 55, 56.

[4] *Inf.*, xxvi. 23.

[5] *Par.*, vii. 139 ff., and especially *Purg.* xvi. 67 ff.

of astronomical science, frequently interwoven with mythology. But besides this scientific interest, he was deeply touched by the beauty, the mystery, and the tranquillising power of the celestial orbs. There is hardly a phase of them that he has not touched upon; many of his descriptions and allusions have a truth and vividness unsurpassed even in this present day of Nature worship. Here, as elsewhere in the *Divina Commedia*, science and learning and poetry go hand in hand. We have no mere catalogue of dry facts, but the wonderful mechanism of the starry heavens is brought before our eyes, rolling its spheres in celestial harmony, radiant with light and splendour, while the innumerable company of angels and the 'spirits of just men made perfect,' raise the chorus of praise to the *Alto Fattore.*

The sun has been the object of worship and adoration to the greater part of the people of the East. It is thought to be the sun that the Phœnicians worshipped under the name of Baal, and the Ammonites under the name of Moloch. So, too, in the Bible our Saviour is called the Sun of Righteousness; while in the Book of Revelation (xii. 1), the woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet,

signifies the Church clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

It is natural, then, for Dante to make large use of the sun as a symbol, especially of God. In the *Convito* (iii. 12), he says that there is nothing in the world more worthy to serve as a type of God than the sun. In the *Divina Commedia*, God is the sun of the angels[1] that lightens and warms the universe.[2] In similar manner, in Purgatory the sun is used symbolically for Christ; hence the upward-striving spirits cannot advance in the night.[3] So, too, the Virgin Mary shone upon St. Bernard as the sun upon the morning star;[4] and Vergil is the sun that clears every *turbata vista*.[5] Many other examples could be given.

But leaving aside symbol and metaphor, we see the sun treated in the *Divina Commedia* from several points of view—scientific, philosophical, and practical. The number of references is very large. Many terms are used to describe its various functions; it is 'the lamp of the world';[6] the *dolce lume*,[7] the greatest minister

[1] *Par.*, x. 53. [2] *Purg.*, xiii. 19.
[3] *Purg.*, vii. 49-60; the sun here may mean illuminating grace.
[4] *Par.*, xxxii. 107-108. [5] *Inf.*, xi. 91.
[6] *Par.*, i. 38. Cf. Andreas, 837, where it is called *dägcandel* (Lüning, p. 59). [7] *Purg.*, xiii. 16.

of Nature;[1] it warms and lightens the world;[2] it measures time;[3] it leads the traveller aright,[4] opens the petals of the rose,[5] combines with the sap of the vine to form wine,[6] warms the chilled limbs of the sleeper,[7] and gives light to the moon and stars.[8]

We see it in all its phases—dazzling bright at noonday,[9] reflected from mirror or sword-blade,[10] so blinding in its splendour that no mortal eye can endure to look upon it.[11] We behold it kissing the hilltop at early morning,[12] dimly

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[1] *Par.*, x. 28. 'Dante si alzò eminente fra tutti i poeti socchiudendo in un sol verso la più magnifica lode di che mai possa esaltare il sole l'imagiazione' (Monti, quoted by Magistretti, p. 189).

[2] *Purg.*, xiii. 19.

[3] *Par.*, x. 30. Cf. *Petrarch* (sonnet 8), 'Il pianeta che distingue l'ore.' Fraticelli cites in an old canzone, 'La bella stella, che'l tempo misura.'

[4] 'Che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle' (*Inf.*, i. 18).

[5] *Par.*, xxii. 56, 57.

[6] 'Guarda il calor del Sol che si fa vino' (*Purg.*, xxv. 77). This was Galileo's theory; see Venturi, *Similitudini dantesche*, p. 10. Cf. also *Par.*, xxii. 48.

[7] 'Le fredde membra che la notte aggrava.' (*Purg.*, xix. 10, 11.)

[8] 'Per molte luci, in che una risplende.' (*Par.*, xx. 6; *Convito*, ii. 14.)

[9] *Purg.*, xxvii. 79.

[10] *Purg.*, xxxi. 121; *Purg.*, ix. 82-83; *Par.*, xvii. 123.

[11] *Par.*, xxv. 118-120; *Par.*, v. 133; *Purg.*, xxxii. 10, 11; *Purg.*, ix. 84.

[12] *Inf.*, i. 16, 17.

piercing the heavy mist,[1] beating down like a scourge in the dog-days,[2] shining through a cloud-rift on a bank of flowers,[3] blazing full in the face of the wanderer,[4] or flaming red behind him and casting long shadows.[5] At times we see it high in the zenith,[6] or sending back from the western horizon the last level rays—

'Already dead on the low shores.'[7]

Its life-giving power is alluded to in the line,

'He who is father of every mortal life;'[8]

and in another passage we see it at the same time the creator and destroyer of life in the plant.[9]

There are many beautiful passages descriptive of morning and evening. The sun is said to be he who

'*Apporta mane e lascia sera.*'[10]

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[1] *Purg.*, xvii. 5, 6. [2] *Inf.*, xxv. 79, 80.

[3] 'Come a raggio di Sol, che puro mei
Per fratta nube, già prato di fiori
Vider, coperti d'ombra, gli occhi miei.'
(*Par.*, xxiii. 79-81.)

[4] 'Vedi il Sol che in la fronte ti riluce' (*Purg.*, xxvii. 133).

[5] *Purg.*, iii. 16. [6] *Purg.*, xxxiii. 103, 104.

[7] *Purg.*, xvii. 12.

[8] *Par.*, xxii. 116. Cf. *Aristotle*: 'Homo hominem generat et sol.' (See Scartazzini, *in loc.*)

[9] *Purg.*, xi. 116-117.

[10] *Par.*, xxvii. 138. Cf. Guiraut de Borneil—
'Qu'en orien vei l'estela creguda
Qu' adutz lo jorn.'
(Mahn, i. 191.)

Some of the touches here are, of course, conventional, reminiscential of Vergil and Ovid, while others are entirely original. Taking all the passages in the *Divina Commedia* that refer to day and night, we can, by placing them together, obtain a sort of kinetoscopic view of the gradual dawn, progress, and disappearance of the light of day.[1]

We see the stars becoming dim and fading away, giving, as it were, a premonition of the approaching sun;[2] we see the white streak of dawn gradually lighting up the horizon,[3] and the trembling ocean floor glimmering in the faint light;[4] then, as the morning star flashes its last ray over the sea, and itself is eclipsed in the coming solar splendour,[5] we behold

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[1] The following passage was written before I saw the somewhat similar treatment by Zoppi, *Il fenomeno e il concetto della luce studiati in Dante.*

[2] 'Così 'l ciel si chiude
Di vista in vista infino alla più bella' (*Par.*, xxx. 8-9).
This figure is very common among the poets. Cf. Bartsch, *Chrest. de l'Anc. Frc.*, p. 184; Kuttner, *Das Naturgefühl der Altfranzosen*, p. 22; and especially the beautiful lines of the *Carmina Burana*, 'Dum fugaret sidera nuntius Aurorae,' etc. (Schmeller's edition, p. 155).

[3] 'A guisa d'orizzonte che rischiari' (*Par.*, xiv. 69).

[4] 'L'alba vinceva l'ora mattutina,
Che fuggia innanzi, sì che di lontano
Conobbi il tremolar della marina' (*Purg.*, i. 115-117).

[5] 'Par tremolando mattutina stella' (*Purg.*, xii. 90).

'All flushed with rose the eastern horizon,
And all the other sky serenely fair.'[1]

And then, finally, the great sun itself rises, in the full glory of a spring morning,[2] gilding the mountain-tops,[3] rejoicing the heart of man,[4] and satisfying the longing of the parent bird, which has sat all night long on the open branch waiting for the dawn, and watching with eager eyes for the first appearance of the sun.[5] And now the day has come, and already before the 'ante-lucan splendours darkness flees on every side.'[6] Time wears on, the sun is two hours high,[7] and 'all the circles of the sacred mountain are full of the lofty day.'[8] The hour of noon arrives, and the perpendicular rays shoot like arrows from the zenith;[9] then, as the sun descends toward the west, it changes the blue of the sky to the *bianco aspetto di*

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[1] *Purg.*, xxx. 23-24. Cf. also *Par.*, xxxi. 118, 120.

[2] 'E'l Sol montava 'n su con quelle stelle
Ch'eran con lui, quando l'Amor divino
Mosse da prima quelle cose belle' (*Inf.*, i. 38-40).

[3] *Inf.*, i. 16-17.

[4] 'Sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
. . . . . .
L'ora del tempo' (*Inf.*, i. 41-43).

[5] *Par.*, xxiii. 7-9.

[6] *Purg.*, xxvii. 109, 112.

[7] *Purg.*, ii. 55-57.

[8] *Purg.*, xix. 37-38.

[9] *Purg.*, xxvii. 79.

cilestro;[1] and three hours before sunset the level rays begin to lose their dazzling brightness,[2] and the shadows become longer and longer.[3] The same gradual merging together of light and darkness is seen, as in the case of dawn; in some respects we can trace parallel steps in the progress of both. The passages descriptive of evening are equally varied and beautiful as those of morning. It is often hard to keep from uttering terms of admiration which might seem extravagant. It is certain that no more beautiful descriptions of twilight and starlight exist in literature, ancient or modern. We see the earliest approach of quiet evenfall, when the faint stars come forth one by one;[4] and the sun approaching the horizon sends through the air

'Its shining evening rays.'[5]

The almost imperceptible melting away of

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[1] *Purg.*, xxvi. 6. Daudet, in *Le Nabab*, describes this phenomenon in the words, 'L'air chauffée à blanc.'

[2] *Purg.*, xv. 1-5.

[3] *Purg.*, xv. 7, xxvii. 65-66, xvii. 12.

[4] 'Che le stelle apparivan da più lati' (*Purg.*, xvii. 72).

Also 'Lo ciel, che sol di lui prima s'accende,
Subitamente si rifà parvente
Per molte luci' (*Par.*, xx. 4-6).

[5] 'I raggi serotini e lucenti' (*Purg.*, xv. 141).

the long shadows cast by the sun at its setting is rendered in a simple and accurate manner in the passage where Dante, with Vergil and Statius, is making his way from the last terrace to the summit of Purgatory. The sun was already low on the horizon, and the body of Dante, interrupting the rays, casts a long shadow before him, and the sudden disappearance of this shadow apprises the poets that the sun, which is behind them, has set.[1]

The charm and melancholy of early evening is well brought out in the scene in the Valley of Princes, where everything combines to make an exquisite picture; the valley itself carpeted with grass, the fragrance of the flowers, the soft silence of the night, the sky becoming gradually of a deeper blue, the stars that shine overhead, while the sound of distant vesper bells adds the 'still sad music of humanity.'[2] All this is idyllic and romantic; there is another twilight scene, however—a

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[1] 'Io toglieva i raggi
Dinanzi a me del Sol ch'era già basso.
E di pochi scaglion levammo i saggi,
Che'l Sol corcar, per l'ombra che si spense,
Sentimmo dietro ed io e gli miei Saggi.'
(*Purg.*, xxvii. 65-69.)

[2] *Purg.*, viii. 1 ff.

rural scene—without the touch of melancholy. Here we see the countryman lying on the hill-side of a summer evening, looking down into the valley where he has ploughed or tended his vine during the day; and as he looks, the whole valley is alight with the fire-flies darting hither and thither.[1]

The landscape becomes darker and fades upon the glimmering sight;[2] and although the sky becomes crowded with stars, the eye can only pierce a short distance ahead. The new moon gives so little light that people peer into each other's faces as they pass by.[3] First the eastern horizon becomes black, and then it is only a few minutes before in all its immensity 'it is made of one colour.'[4]

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[1] *Inf.*, xxvi. 25-30. Cf. also

'Quale per li seren tranquilli e puri
Discorre ad ora ad or subito fuoco,
Movendo gli occhi, che stavan sicuri' (*Par.*, xv. 13-15).

[2] 'Temp' era già che l'aer s'annerava,
Ma non sì, che tra gli occhi suoi e' miei
Non dichiarasse ciò che pria serrava' (*Purg.*, viii. 49-51).

Cf. the interesting parallel to this passage in *S. Silvæ Aquitanæ Peregrinatio ad loca Sancta*, p. 51: 'Ea hora, qua incipit homo hominem posse cognoscere.'

[3] 'Come suol da sera
Guardar l'un l'altro sotto nuova luna' (*Inf.*, xv. 18-19).

[4] 'In tutte le sue parti immense
Fosse orizzonte fatto d'un aspetto
E notte avesse tutte sue dispense' (*Purg.*, xxvii. 70-72).

And so in its turn night wears on; midnight comes and goes,[1] and at last the hour before dawn arrives, the darkest and coldest of all.[2]

The darkness of the Inferno is profound, but the nights of Purgatory are beautiful and sweet. Overhead stretches

'The sky made beautiful by countless lights,'[3]

the moon in its different phases moves about in the midst of stars of all degrees of brilliancy.

The moon, quaintly called the sister of the sun,[4] is naturally less frequently mentioned in the *Divina Commedia* than the sun. There are some passages which resemble Vergil or Homer, and in the description of the moon dimming the light of the stars by its own refulgence he is more accurate than Homer in a similar description.[5] We see the moon

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[1] 'Di mezza notte' (*Purg.*, xxix. 54).

[2] 'Nell'ora che non può 'l calor diurno
Intiepidar più 'l freddo della Luna' (*Purg.*, xix. 1-2).

[3] 'E'l ciel, cui tanti lumi fanno bello' (*Par.*, ii. 130).

[4] *Purg.*, xxiii. 119-121.

[5] 'La Luna quasi a mezza notte tarda
Facea le stelle a noi parer più rade' (*Purg.*, xviii. 76-77.)

Metaphors drawn from the superior effulgence of the moon are very common. Cf. Milton, *Par. Lost*, ii. 1052-53 (probably imitated from Dante, *Par.*, xxviii. 20); cf. also, 'Sam der liehte mâne vor den sternen thuot' (*Nibelungenlied*, Lachmann's ed., 760).

It is referred to mythologically as one of the two eyes of the

in all its phases—in a 'cloudless sky at midnight in the middle of its month,'[1] in the opposite phase at new moon,[2] and in the last quarter hanging like a burning brand on the horizon.[3]

But here, as elsewhere, Dante was not only the poet, but the interest of the scientific observer was aroused; and no sooner did he rise with Beatrice to the heaven of the moon, than he asked for an explanation of the spots, which in his day were thought to represent Cain with a bundle of faggots.[4]

The number of references to stars is very large. The heavens are called the 'starry wheels,' while by way of contrast hell is cursed with 'starless air.'

It is not without significance that each *Cantica* ends with the word stars. The relief and joy

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sky (*Purg.*, xx. 132), the daughter of Latona (*Par.*, x. 67), and Proserpina (*Inf.*, x. 80).

[1] 'Più chiaro assai, che Luna per sereno
Di mezza notte nel suo mezzo mese.'
(*Purg.*, xxix. 53-54.)

[2] 'Come suol da sera
Guardar l'un l'altro sotto nuova luna.
(*Inf.*, xv. 18-19; cf. *Verg.*, vi. 270.)

[3] 'Fatta com' un scheggion, che tututt' arda' (*Purg.*, xviii. 78). Some texts read *secchione* for *scheggion;* in this case the shape of the moon would be compared to a bucket.

[4] *Par.*, ii. 49 ff. Dante refers to Cain again in *Inf.*, xx. 126.

of escaping from the Infernal World is expressed in the line—

'And thence we issued forth to see the stars.'[1]

So, too, in Purgatory, the soul that has been plunged in the beneficent waters of Lethe and Eunoe is made

'Pure and disposed to ascend to the stars;'[2]

and after the supreme vision of the poet in the *Paradiso*, he tells us that his will and desire are always moved by

'The Love that moves the sun and other stars.'[3]

The celestial orbs are a lure to lead men to God;[4] they are the 'beautiful things which the heavens bear,'[5] and the lights which make beautiful the sky.[6] The following lines, opening up as they do to the imagination gulf upon gulf of starlit space, are unsurpassed for beauty.

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[1] *Inf.*, xxxiv. 139.
[2] *Purg.*, xxxiii. 145.
[3] *Par.*, xxxiii. 145.
[4] 'Gli occhi rivolgi al logoro, che gira
Lo Rege eterno che le ruote magne.'
(*Purg.*, xix. 62-63.)
[5] 'Delle cose belle
Che porta 'l ciel' (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 137-138).
[6] *Par.*, ii. 130.

'As in her fullest splendour Trivia smiles
Amid the everlasting nymphs that paint
The sky in all its gulfs of endless space.'[1]

One may confidently assert that no such perfect lines descriptive of the stars have ever been written. Shakespeare and others can furnish famous passages, but none, I think, equal to those of Dante. They have all the quality of his art, truth, clearness, possessing the power of touching deeply the imagination, yet terse and compact, containing not a word too much. We see the stars at all hours of the night, in all degrees of brilliancy, fading away at the approach of dawn,[2] gradually appearing as twilight comes on,[3] shining with splendour in a moonless night, keenly sparkling after the

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1 'Quale ne' plenilunii sereni
Trivia ride tra le ninfe eterne,
Che dipingono l' ciel per tutti i seni.'
(*Par.*, xxiii. 25-27.)

2 'Cosl 'l ciel si chiude
Di vista in vista infino alla più bella.'
(*Par.*, xxx. 8-9.)

3 'Gia eran sopra noi tanto levati
Gli ultimi raggi che la notte segue,
Che le stelle apparivan da più lati.'
(*Purg.*, xvii. 70-72.)

Cf. also *Par.*, xx. 5-6.

winds have cleared the atmosphere,[1] or eclipsed by the greater effulgence of the moon.[2] The motion of the constellations about the Pole[3] is referred to, those which are nearest to it never setting beneath the horizon.[4]

In the days before the invention of the telescope, it was impossible to tell exactly what the Milky Way is, and various hypotheses were advanced. Dante describes it as a faint streak stretching from Pole to Pole, and pointed out by stars of greater or less brilliancy,[5] and further says it is a subject of doubt among the learned, alluding to the theories held concerning it.[6] In the *Convito* (ii. 15), he tells us what these theories are. Pythagoras attributed it to the scorching heat of the sun; other philosophers, like Anaxagoras and Democritus, said it was the light of the sun reflected in that part; Dante himself says, referring back to Aristotle, that it is nothing else than a multitude of fixed stars in that place, so small that they cannot be distinguished, but which cause the whiteness called the Milky Way. The common people called it the Path of St. James.

In speaking of the various planets, which he

[1] *Par.*, xxviii. 83-84. [2] *Purg.*, xviii. 77. [3] *Par.*, x. 78.
[4] *Purg.*, xxx. 2. [5] *Par.*, xiv. 97-99. [6] *Par.*, xiv. 99.

calls stars, he gives in a word or two the real or fancied attributes of each. Mars is the *affocata stella*, which becomes still redder through the morning mists;[1] Mercury is *piccola*;[2] Jupiter white and tempered;[3] Saturn is a crystal, of cold nature, cooling the earth as the moon does.[4] Other functions and attributes are assigned to the different planets from the name. Mars is called *forte*,[5] Venus *conforta ad amar*,[6] and burns with passion,[7] while her double function as morning and evening star is quaintly alluded to in the line:—

'Che 'l Sol vagheggia or da coppa or da ciglio.'[8]

It would be interesting to know whether the poet meant anything more than the evident

[1] *Par.*, xiv. 86-87; *Purg.*, ii. 14. In *Convito*, ii. 14, Dante tells us that Mars dries up and burns things on account of its heat. Hence the references to the malign influence of this planet are not merely mythological or figurative (*Inf.*, xiii. 144-145; and xxiv. 145-147). He also speaks of a fiery cross caused by these vapours following Mars. Was this the first suggestion of the wonderful cross in the Heaven of Mars (*Par.*, xiv. 100 ff.)?

[2] *Par.*, vi. 112.

[3] 'Per lo candor della temprata stella' (*Par.*, xviii. 68; *Convito*, ii. 14).

[4] *Purg.*, xix. 2-3; *Par.*, xxi. 25; *Convito*, ii. 14.

[5] 'Questa stella forte (=guerriera)' (*Par.*, xvii. 77).

[6] 'Lo bel pianeta, ch' ad amar conforta' (*Purg.*, i. 19).

[7] 'Che di fuoco d'amor par sempre ardente' (*Purg.*, xxvii. 96).

[8] *Par.*, viii. 11-12.

allegory by the four exceedingly brilliant stars which he saw in Purgatory. He says their light was like that of the sun for brightness, and that they were never seen before except by the *prima gente*.[1] He may have known of the Southern Cross through the catalogue of Ptolemy, or perhaps have read a description of them by the celebrated Venetian traveller, Marco Polo.[2]

The other celestial phenomena mentioned by Dante may be dismissed briefly. We have references to the eclipse and its cause,[3] and the Blessed in the Heaven of Fixed Stars flame brightly *a guisa di comete*.[4] Shooting-stars are referred to several times, almost invariably as a conventional figure for rapidity. August is the month when they are the most frequent, and they are seen to shoot with lightning-like swiftness across the serene blue sky, or pierce the clouds that gather around the setting sun.[5] One fine passage describes the spectator following them with his eyes as they lose themselves in the distance.[6]

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[1] *Purg.*, i. 22-24, and 37-39. [2] See Wegele, pages 417-418.
[3] *Par.*, xxvii. 35; *De Mon.*, iii. 4.
[4] *Par.*, xxiv. 12. [5] *Purg.*, v. 37-39.
[6] *Par.*, xv. 13 ff. Parallels in other poets could be multiplied.

CHAPTER X

LIGHT, FIRE, AND COLOUR

DANTE, like Milton, seems to have had a profound love for light, which to him is the *dolce lume*, and his consummate art is seen at its best in his use of its phenomena. The *Divina Commedia* is literally crowded with references to it;[1] every phase of sunlight, moonlight, starlight, and all kinds of artificial light find their apt rendition in it.[2] I have already discussed the sun, moon, and stars, and it remains here only to examine some of the phases of artificial light used by Dante.[3]

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[1] Magistretti calls it the 'divina poema del fuoco e della luce' (p. 131).

[2] Even the phosphorescent gleam on water at night seems to be referred to in one passage (*Par.*, xxx. 61-69; cf. Humboldt, *Cosmos*, ii. p. 419).

[3] Light plays so vast and important a part in Dante's conception of the physical and spiritual world, that a complete discussion would lead us too far from the subject of this book. Cf. for an exhaustive discussion of this whole subject, Magistretti, *Il fuoco e la luce nella Divina Commedia*.

Many of these passages are very beautiful, such as those which refer to the light of a candle seen through alabaster,[1] the coal that shines white-hot through a flame,[2] the intense effulgence of molten metal,[3] or the shower of light that streams in all directions when a burning brand is shaken.[4] Hell being the land of darkness, *terra oscura*, by far the larger number of these references are found in the *Paradiso*, where light and fire and sweet sounds form almost all of the material used by the Poet.[5]

The stars are spheres of light in which the spirits of the Redeemed shine, sometimes dimly seen in the radiance about them,[6] like re-

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[1] *Par.*, xv. 24.

[2] *Par.*, xiv. 52-54.

[3] 'Ch' io nol vedessi sfavillar d'intorno,
Qual ferro che bollente esce dal fuoco.'
(*Par.*, i. 59-60.)

[4] 'Come nel percuoter de' ciocchi arsi
Surgono innumerabili faville.
(*Par.*, xviii. 100-101.)

[5] Of the word *lume* we find five examples in the *Inferno*, twenty-four in the *Purgatorio*, and sixty-five in the *Paradiso*; *luce* furnishes respectively five, nineteen, and seventy-six. Besides these more common words, there are a number of others used almost exclusively in the *Paradiso*, such as *splendore*, *folgore*, *lucerna*, *facella*, *robbi*, *lucciole*; while the souls of the Blessed are called *gemme luculente*, *margherite luculente*, *cari e lucidi lapilli*, *vivi topazi*, *rubinetti*, *faville vive*, *zaffiro*.

[6] Cf. Matthew xiii. 43.

flections from shallow water, or a pearl on a white forehead; sometimes appearing as splendours and flashes, circles and crowns and garlands of light, ever moving and changing, increasing and decreasing in brilliancy, according to the measure of God's grace and glory within them. At times these lights take on the strangest forms; they group themselves together in the shape of crosses,[1] over the arms and body of which the red lights flash and run;[2] again they take on the appearance of an eagle,[3] or so arrange themselves as to form the words of Proverbs—'*diligite* justitiam qui judicatis terram.'[4] The higher Dante mounts in Paradise, the more intense becomes the light, and the less becomes his power to describe it, until the Empyrean is reached, and he gazes into the river of ineffable splendour.

It is one of the amazing things about Dante that he never seems to falter or fail. From the

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[1] *Par.*, xiv. 100-102.

[2] 'Dî corno in corno, e tra la cima e 'l basso,
Si movean lumi' (*Ibid.* 109-110).

[3] 'E, quietata ciascuna in suo loco,
La testa e 'l collo d'un aquila vidi
Rappresentare' (*Par.*, xviii. 106-108).

[4] *Par.*, xviii. 76-96.

first canto of the *Inferno* to the last of the *Paradiso*, there is a steady upward movement; the poem gains constantly in beauty and sublimity. Although the *Paradiso* requires more time, thought, and loving devotion to be thoroughly comprehended, yet when we do penetrate into the heart of its mystery, we are filled with wonder at the genius which could, with such few materials, produce such a variety of beautiful effects.[1]

Closely allied to the use of light by Dante is that of fire, which often seems to be used synonymously with the former. In the *Inferno* it is used as a means of punishment and the expression of the wrath of God;[2] in the *Purgatorio* it purges away the sins of the souls,[3] who, having climbed up the lower terraces, finally pass through the wall of flame which

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[1] Metaphors drawn from light are universal, hence the number of them in the *Divina Commedia* is very large. Grace and love and knowledge are all compared to light; it shines from the eyes and words of Beatrice; Vergil is addressed by Dante as *luce mia*, God is '*La prima luce che tutta la raia.*' He is the '*eterno lume, alta luce,*' etc.

The symbolical use is so wide-reaching and so all-pervading in the *Divina Commedia*, that it would lead me far from my purpose even to attempt to discuss it.

[2] Cf. Psalm xviii. 8; Deut. xxxii. 22.

[3] Cf. Vergil, *Æneid*, vi. 742; and Ovid, *Fasti*, iv. 640.

stands between them and the Earthly Paradise.[1]

Many parts of Hell are wrapped in a garment of eternal fire, and in the seventh terrace of Purgatory we hear the roar of the great flames as they are blown upward.[2] We see the walls of the City of Dis, gleaming red-hot in the darkness,[3] and the flickering flames that lick the feet of the Simoniacs who are plunged head downward in narrow holes;[4] besides this, many minor details are given—the way in which oily things burn,[5] the gradual blackening of paper before the advancing flame,[6] sparks flying,[7] and coals fanned by the wind.[8]

There is one striking allusion to death at the stake, a sight which the poet tells us he himself had seen.[9] We need only to remember that

[1] Cf. Magistretti, p. 39.
[2] *Purg.*, xxv. 112-113.
[3] *Inf.*, viii. 70-72.
[4] *Inf.*, xix. 25.
[5] 'Qual suole il fiammeggiar delle cose unte
Muoversi pur su per l'estrema buccia.'
(*Inf.*, xix. 28-29.)
[6] 'Come procede innanzi dall' ardore
Per lo papiro suso un color bruno,
Che non è nero ancora, e 'l bianco muore.
(*Inf.*, xxv. 64-66.)
[7] *Par.*, vii. 8; xviii. 101.
[8] *Par.*, xvi. 28-29.
[9] 'Guardando 'l fuoco, e immaginando forte
Umani corpi già veduti accesi' (*Purg.*, xxvii. 17-18).

Dante was condemned to such a death if found within the territory of Florence, in order to see how he must have felt when he wrote these words.[1]

The sense of colour among the ancients does not seem to have been highly developed; the same terms are used to describe things essentially different in colour; to Homer the sea is always purple or dark, and Vergil speaks of *black* blood, sweat, and sand.[2] In the Middle Ages there was a certain love for bright and brilliant colours, and Dante gives evidence of the same.[3] And yet there were far less shades of colour used or even known then than now. Although, for the most part, Dante uses only general terms of colour, in some places he has shown a fine discrimination of the exact shades of delicate colouring. There can be no better rendering of the tender green of young leaves than he gives in the description of the angel's

[1] What has been said concerning the metaphorical and symbolical use of light applies here also. We hear of the fire of love, desire, and speech, and of the sparks of envy and avarice. The spirits of Heaven are called *fuoco benedetto, amore acceso, fuoco sì felice*; the Virgin Mary is *la coronata fiamma*; and S. Dominic is *tutto serafico in ardore.*

[2] *Aen.*, ix. 711, 809-11, 697.

[3] Cf. the expressions *ridon le carte* (*Purg.*, xi. 82), and *diletto di colore* (Moore, p. 157).

wings in the Valley of the Princes; and the same may be said of the delicate shade of the apple-blossoms.[1]

Often the poet selects the exact words which describe a colour at its best. To say a thing is as red as blood is common enough, but what other poet has used the expression, 'red as blood at the moment it spurts from the veins';[2] so, too, Dante adds to the effectiveness of the comparison when he says, 'as green as emerald, when freshly broken';[3] and that a certain colour is like dry earth when it is freshly dug up.[4] In Earthly Paradise Faith is represented as being 'white as snow newly fallen';[5] this latter touch, of course, is common.

The list of different colours in the *Divina Commedia* is not a long one; we have the livid colour of the rock in one place,[6] a *scaglion perso* in another,[7] and various shades of brown

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[1] *Purg.*, viii. 28, and xxxii. 58.

[2] 'Come sangue che fuor di vena spicchia' (*Purg.*, ix. 102).

[3] 'Fresco smeraldo allorachè si fiacca' (*Purg.*, vii. 75).

[4] 'Cenere, o terra, che secca si cavi' (*Purg.*, ix. 115).

[5] *Purg.*, xxix. 126.

[6] 'Col livido color della petraia' (*Purg.*, xiii. 9).

[7] *Purg.*, ix. 97. 'Il perso è un colore misto di purpureo e di nero, ma vince il nero, e da lui si denomina' (*Convito*, iv. cap. 20).

in burning paper. The rainbow lends its brilliant colours;[1] we see the gorgeous effects of rubies and gold struck by the rays of the sun.[2]

There are several kinds of white—that of snow or marble,[3] the lustre of silver contrasting with gold,[4] and the contrast of pearl and white forehead;[5] we have the green of young leaves,[6] the darker shade of forest trees,[7] and the enamel of the grass;[8] of reds there are the different shades of molten glass or metal,[9] the light of flames beautifully contrasting with the green trees,[10] the colour of blood, the faint blush on a

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[1] *Par.*, xxxiii. 118; *Purg.*, xxi. 50.

[2] 'Parea ciascuna rubinetto in cui,
Raggio di Sole ardesse si acceso.'
(*Par.*, xix. 4-5; cf. also *Par.*, ix. 69.)
'Di color d'oro in che raggio traluce.'
(*Par.*, xxi. 28.)

[3] *Par.*, xxxi. 15; *Purg.*, xxix. 126; x. 31; ix. 95.

[4] 'Pareva argento lì d'oro distinto' (*Par.*, xviii. 96; cf. also *Purg.*, ix. 118).

[5] 'Perla in bianca fronte' (*Par.*, iii. 14).

[6] 'Verdi, come fogliette pur mo nate' (*Purg.* viii. 28).

[7] 'Sotto foglie verdi e rami nigri' (*Purg.*, xxxiii. 110).

[8] 'Sopra 'l verde smalto' (*Inf.*, iv. 118).

[9] 'E giammai non si videro in fornace
Vetri o metalli sì lucenti e rossi.'
(*Purg.*, xxiv. 137-138.)

[10] 'Tal, quale un fuoco acceso,
Ci si fe l'aer sotto i verdi rami.'
(*Purg.*, xxix. 34-35.)

lady's cheek,[1] the red of roses, the crimson hue of sunset and the rosy flush of sunrise clouds, and the delicate colour of a candle seen through alabaster.[2] Although the blue of the sea is not referred to in the *Divina Commedia*, we have a number of references to the different shades of the sky—'the sweet colour of oriental sapphire,' that is seen in morning,[3] the deeper blue of the western horizon at sunrise,[4] and the peculiar *bianco cilestro* produced by the post meridian sun.[5]

There are some vivid and brilliant combinations of colours in the *Divina Commedia*; the angels are seen with faces of flame, wings of gold, and clad in garments of white;[6] the Griffin seen by the poet in the Earthly Paradise has limbs of gold and body of white and red.[7]

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[1] 'In bianca donna, quando 'l volto,
Suo si discarchi di vergogna il carco' (*Par.*, xviii. 65-66).

[2] These references have all been given in other connections.

[3] *Purg.*, i. 13.

[4] *Purg.*, xxx. 24.

[5] *Purg.*, xxvi. 6.

[6] 'Le facce tutte avean di fiamma viva
E l'ale d'oro; e l'altro tanto bianco
Che nulla neve a quel termine arriva.'
(*Par.*, xxxi. 13-15.)

[7] 'Le membra d'oro avea quanto era uccello,
E bianche l'altre di vermiglio miste.'
(*Purg.*, xxix. 113, 114.)

The three maidens who represent the theological virtues are of different colours—one red as fire, the other green, the other white as snow;[1] while the four earthly virtues are clothed in purple.[2] Beatrice herself presents a dazzling picture as she stands upon the mystic chariot and rebukes her ancient lover. She wears a green mantle and white veil, and is clothed with colour of living flame.[3] So vivid are these colours, that they produce almost the same effect as a painting.[4]

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[1] *Purg.*, xxix. 121-126.

[2] *Purg.*, xxix. 130, 131.

[3] 'Sovra candido vel cinta d'oliva
Donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto
Vestita di color di fiamma viva' (*Purg.*, xxx. 31-33).

[4] In many cases these colours are used symbolically. In the three steps that lead to the gate of Purgatory (*Purg.*, ix. 94 ff.), the white signifies sincerity; the one, *tinto più che perso*, stands for contrition; and the blood-red represents love toward God. So, too, the three nymphs, arrayed in red, white, and green (*ibid.* xxix. 121 ff.), represent Faith, Hope, and Charity. Similar symbolical interpretation must be given to the three faces of Lucifer: red, white, and yellow (*Inf.*, xxxiv. 38 ff.).

CHAPTER XI

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF DANTE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD NATURE

WE have seen, in the preceding chapters, that Dante has drawn material for his poem from nearly all the various phases of Nature—from land and sea and sky; from mountain, stream, and flower. All the references to Nature in the *Divina Commedia*, taken together, produce a picture which is at the same time broader and more detailed than anything we find among the ancients. Homer's descriptions are general and plastic rather than picturesque.[1] The phenomena he alludes to in metaphor and simile are those which are usual and of frequent recurrence — those which the poet

[1] 'Schon Herder bemerkte, dass Shakespeare da Farben und Duft gebe, wo die Griechen nur Umrisse zeichnen' (Biese, p. 210).

must have seen hundreds of times himself, and which were retained by no especial effort of memory.[1] In all these respects Dante marks an advance over his predecessors. We do not find in him the recurrence of the same epithets,[2] or the constant repetition of the same phenomena in metaphors and similes,[3] while some of the subtlest effects of Nature are rendered in a masterly manner. Again, the very plan of the *Divina Commedia* made it necessary for the poet to give, not merely touches of description and occasional references, but a continual succession of landscapes, often carefully and minutely described.

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[1] These phases of Nature Homer constantly repeats, often in the very same words. Such are the frequently occurring metaphors drawn from the pine or oak on the mountain top, cut down by the woodman's axe, or uprooted by the storm; such also the lion and wolf leaping upon the sheep, fire in the forest, various phases of the storm, the moon outshining the stars. Later they passed into the common stock of literary property, and have come down even to our own day.

[2] Cf. *πολυτρήρωνα*, abounding in doves, applied to Messa (*Il.* ii. 582); *εἰνοσίφυλλον*, quivering with leaves, applied to Pelion (*Il.* ii. 757). A great deal of the Nature in Homer is described in this way.

[3] Yet we find repetition of the metaphor drawn from the migration of birds, and the sea is compared to the *Divina Commedia* throughout the poem. It is interesting to note that Dante has used many figures in almost the identical form in which they are found in the *Convito*, *Canzoniere*, and *De Monarchiâ*.

Yet, on the other hand, when compared with modern writers, Dante himself seems narrow in the use he makes of Nature. The poet and painter of to-day manifest a wide and deep sympathy for all phases of the world in which we live, for all manifestations of life, and for all variety of scenery. The grassy lawn and limpid stream are scarcely more attractive to them than the snowy Alps or the sandy deserts of Africa. We have already seen that the feeling for the sublime and wild in Nature, which is entirely lacking among the ancients, is likewise lacking to Dante. The beauty and glory of mountain scenery, the picturesque and romantic effects of rocky landscapes, find no expression in the *Divina Commedia.* Nor do we find any self-conscious effort on the part of the poet to give a complete and harmonious picture of Nature. There is none of that impulse, so characteristic of our own times, which sends the artist over distant seas to study among the mountains or on desert sands the more unusual and evanescent phases of Nature.

The practical use made by Dante of the world of Nature is shown chiefly in metaphors and similes. This is common to all times and

nations. As we have already seen, language itself is studded with fossilised Nature-figures. Of course, the great number of phenomena which Dante alludes to in his figures are general and well known, many of them frequently used by his predecessors. Yet even in these cases we need not assume that his use of them is not the result of his own observation. Even the most common things he invests with a clearness, a picturesqueness, and force unknown to those before him. Take, for example, the description of the dogs in summer snapping at the fleas and flies that torment them; the two bands of ants meeting and consulting; the little stork trying to leave its nest; and especially that exquisite picture of the little timid sheep leaving the fold one by one —a picture unsurpassed for beauty, yet one of the most common and conventional in literature.

But there are other phases of Nature which Dante was the first to introduce into poetry, such as the hand bathed and smoking in winter, the change of colour in burning paper, the lizard flashing across the sunlit road, and especially the phosphorescent glow on water at night. In all these we see a closeness of observation

far in advance of the ancients or the poet's own contemporaries. We have only to compare his minuteness of observation and his really wonderful skill in bringing a picture before the reader in a word or two, with the oft-repeated conventional references to birds and flowers by troubadours and minnesingers,[1] or with the paucity of references to Nature in mediæval French and German[2] epic poetry, to see the justification of Burckhardt's statement, that Dante was the first to show the modern feeling for Nature.[3]

Again, Dante makes a practical use of Nature as a stage or background for the action of his triple drama. In this respect he is in line with the ancients, to whom the idea of describing Nature for and by herself was unknown. Man was all in all to them.[4] The business of the poet was to tell of the action of his heroes; hence we see only so much of Nature as was necessary to show these actions in their proper setting.[5] In Dante's day art was still absorbed

[1] See page 33 ff. [2] See page 33, note.

[3] 'Aber die festen Beweise für eine tiefere Wirkung grosser landschaftlicher Anblicke auf das Gemüth beginnen mit Dante' (ii. p. 17).

[4] Cf. Lessing, *Laocoon*, ch. 2.

[5] Ancient literature was thoroughly objective; it flourished

in man, to the more or less neglect of the inanimate world, although man then was not merely treated as the hero of epic or drama, but as a being endowed with deep feelings, and filled with political and religious aspirations. When the poet wrote the *Divina Commedia*, he had one clear definite purpose in mind—to show the world the inevitable consequences of sin, and to make known what he conceived to be God's plan for the temporal and spiritual government of mankind. His poem is an example of marvellous condensation, and there is no place on this crowded stage for lengthy descriptions of Nature which might be more or less irrelevant to the main purpose of the work.

Mythology had greatly affected the feeling for Nature among the Greeks and Romans; whether the people (as in the days of Homer) believed in the various divinities, or the poets

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chiefly in the epic and drama. Stories of adventure, a representation of life in action on the stage,—this is what the poet and public sought, the one to compose, the other to see and hear. To-day a great change has taken place; all literature is subjective, and this subjectivity finds expression in lyrical poetry and the novel. The mind of the ancients was simple, that of the moderns is complex. The personal feeling for Nature is one of the most intimate that the heart can possess; hence we need not wonder if we find but little trace of it in an age when deep feeling rarely showed itself in literature.

merely used them as ornaments and decoration, as is the case with Vergil. With the advent of Christianity this mythology disappeared, or merely lingered on in a changed form among popular mediæval superstitions. Hence, in his view of the relations between Nature and the supernatural world, Dante marks a world-wide advance over Homer. We have already shown that, differing from Aristotle, Dante sharply differentiates Nature from the great Creator whose instrument and minister she is. God has made all things, founded all laws, and under His directing hand Nature pursues her regular, unresting, and beneficent course.

But, on the other hand, this God who sits afar off, and looks down from the Empyrean upon the wonderful mechanism of the Universe,[1] bears little or no resemblance to the modern idea of the immanence of God in all Nature, that living soul, which, entering into hill and valley, flower and stream, forms a means of communication between them and the soul of man.

Perhaps in nothing does Dante show a greater advance over the ancients than in his

[1] 'E questo quieto e pacifico cielo è lo luogo di quella Somma Deità che sè sola compiutamente vede' (*Convito*, ii. 4).

view of the function of Nature.[1] Only certain phases of the landscape appealed to the Greeks; it was the ploughed field, the meadow good for pasture that they admired. The elements of usefulness and ease and comfort are very prominent in the landscapes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[2] In nearly every metaphor we catch a glimpse of the practical side of life—agriculture, pastoral life, commerce, hunting, war, and religious ceremonies.

On the other hand, according to Dante, Nature has a high mission to carry out. By the eternal beauty of earth, sea, and sky, she draws all souls towards Him who is the 'great sea of being.'[3] Thus in the nineteenth canto of the *Purgatorio* he calls the skies a celestial lure,[4] and in the fourteenth canto of the same he tells us that the heavens, like a celestial voice, are calling to man, as they unroll themselves in beauty before him, while he goes on his way with downward-bending eyes.[5]

Nature was ordained by God to give joy

[1] We must be careful not to confound Nature as used in this paragraph with Dante's own definition as seen in Chapter I. Here it is used in its modern acceptation.

[2] Cf. Ruskin and Humboldt.

[3] *Par.*, i. 113.

[4] *Purg.*, xix. 62.

[5] *Purg.*, xiv. 148-150; cf. also *Convito*, iii. 5.

and gladness to the heart of man; and in the *Paradiso* we are told that whatever eye can see or mind conceive was so made that no one can behold it without a feeling of pleasure therein.[1]

There is one passage in the *Purgatorio* which contains the essence of Dante's view of the function of Nature. The poet has finally reached the high plateau of the Earthly Paradise, and sees in the midst of the divine landscape which unrolls before his wondering eyes,

> 'A lady, alone, going on her way,
> Singing and plucking the flowers, one by one,
> With which was covered all her path.'[2]

She speaks to him, and says that perchance he will find it hard to understand her joy in the beauty of the place, but that light on the subject will come to him if he will recall the ninety-second Psalm, one verse of which runs as follows: 'For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands.'[3] Mr. Ruskin, who dis-

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[1] 'Quanto per mente o per occhio si gira
Con tanto ordine fe, ch'esser non puote
Senza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira' (*Par.*, x. 4-6).

[2] *Purg.*, xxviii. 40-42.

[3] 'Voi siete nuovi; e forse perch' io rido
Cominciò ella, in questo luogo, eletto
All' umana natura per suo nido,

cusses this passage at length, calls it the most important not only in Dante, but in the whole circle of poetry. 'It contains,' he says, 'the first great confession of the discovery by the human race (I mean as a matter of experience, not of revelation), that their happiness was not in themselves, and that their labour was not to have their own service as its chief end. It embodies in a few syllables the *sealing* difference between the Greek and the mediæval, in that the former sought the flower and herb for his own uses, the latter for God's honour; the former, primarily and on principle, contemplated his own beauty and the workings of his own mind; and the latter, primarily and on principle, contemplated Christ's beauty and the workings of the mind of Christ.'[1]

There are three ways in which Nature may arouse the interest and gain the affection of mankind. First, by appealing to the physical or purely animal part of the being; secondly, by awakening a scientific or intellectual curio-

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Maravigliando tienvi alcun sospetto:
Ma luce rende il salmo *Delectasti*,
Che puote disnebbiar vostro intelletto.'
(*Purg.*, xxviii. 76-81.)

[1] *Modern Painters*, III. ch. xiv.

sity; and thirdly, by stirring the deeper and more personal emotions.

Homer's joy in the world about him is to some extent like that of a child—utterly unconscious; it is the delight produced by blue sky, fresh breezes, and sweet odours affecting the senses of a race of men developed in all physical strength and health. The more healthy the body, the sounder the senses, the deeper and purer will be this physical pleasure, which the modern civilised world, by the increase of sedentary occupations, by the excessive cultivation of intellect and soul at the expense of the body, has undoubtedly lost to a large extent.

Traces of this physical joy in Nature are seen in the troubadours, with their outburst of song at the coming of spring, when they could live out of doors, making love, gathering flowers, and dancing under the trees. So, too, Dante, in his lyrical poetry, gives some expression of this same feeling. But in the *Divina Commedia* the poet is too stern and earnest and sad, perhaps to feel, at any rate to show it.

There is perhaps no innate contradiction between science and poetry,[1] but it is not often

[1] Darwin, however, says there is.

that they are found together in the same man; Dante, like Goethe, half a millennium later, was not only drawn by the beauty of Nature, but he had likewise an unquenchable intellectual curiosity, and sought diligently to understand the meaning of the universe in which he lived.

No other poet has ever combined the loftiest poetry with the discussion of such complicated topics in all branches of learning. In one place we find a long discussion of the origin and development of life, which, naïve and scholastic as it is, shows some lines of resemblance to the modern doctrines of biology;[1] in another place there is a learned discussion between the poet and Beatrice concerning the cause of the spots in the moon, in which an actual experiment in optics is given.[2]

The whole structure of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise shows a thorough knowledge of the Ptolemaic system; and we invariably find astronomical facts, mingled with classical quotations, in the descriptions of stellar phenomena. But not only in specific passages do we find evidence of Dante's love for science, but in brief allusions to the various aspects of Nature

[1] *Purg.*, xxv. 37 ff.

[2] *Par.*, ii. 49 ff.

—metaphors, figures, descriptions—a word or two is added giving the cause of the phenomenon in question. Examples of this abound.

Thus Statius, explaining the trembling of Purgatory at the release of a soul, says it is not caused as earthquakes are, by means of subterranean winds, alluding to a theory held in his day of the cause of seismic phenomena.[1] So, too, lightning is shot down from a dense cloud,[2] the halo about the moon is caused by the air being saturated with moisture,[3] and rain is condensed,[4] snow frozen,[5] and shooting stars burning, vapour.[6] Now note here that the object is not to tell these scientific facts merely; they are brought in secondarily, though never

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1 'Ma per vento, che in terra si nasconda,
Non so come, quassù non tremò mai.'
(*Purg.*, xxi. 56-57.)

2 'Non scese mai con sì veloce moto
Fuoco di spessa nube' (*Purg.*, xxxii. 109-110).

3 'Quando l' aere è pregno
Sì che ritegna il fil che fa la zona' (*Par.*, x. 68-69).

4 'Quell' umido vapor, che in acqua riede
Tosto che sale dove 'l freddo il coglie.'
(*Purg.*, v. 110-111.)

5 'Si come di vapor gelati fiocca
In giuso l'aer nostro' (*Par.*, xxvii. 67-68).

6 'Vapori accesi non vid' io sì tosto
Di prima notte mai fender sereno,
Nè, Sol calando, nuvole d'agosto' (*Purg.*, v. 37-39).

irrelevantly. The primary purpose in every case is to give a picture or refer to the phenomenon itself.[1]

What, in this whole subject, distinguishes the moderns from the ancients more than anything else, is the so-called sentimental feeling for Nature. The poet of to-day tells his own feelings and reflections in her presence; he finds in her calm and consolation in hours of trouble, and an added joy in gladness. She is a spirit with whom he can commune, and love with a personal love like that of man for woman. She sympathises with his moods as he does with hers. 'Tears, idle tears,' rise to the eye of Tennyson,

> 'In looking on the happy autumn fields,
> And thinking of the days that are no more.'[2]

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[1] Other examples may be found in *Par.*, xxviii. 22-24; xiv. 1-3; xii. 10-15; viii. 22; and *Purg.*, ii. 14; xv. 16-21; xvii. 32-33; xxv. 77-78. Somewhat similar to the above is Dante's topographical accuracy, and the way in which he, in describing colours, gives the exact moment or circumstance when they are most brilliant (see page 179).

[2] In speaking of the modern love for Nature, however, we must remember that it is by no means universal or always the same. To say nothing of the difference between the narrowness and monotony of Lamartine and the deep and wide sympathy of Wordsworth, we find at the present time a vast difference in the attitude toward Nature of civilised and uncivilised nations, of the north and south, of the Latin and

Now, of course, there is no definite expression of this in Homer or Dante, and but little in Shakespeare or Milton. It is characteristic of the nineteenth century, and in a great many cases has degenerated into mawkish sentimentality.

A great deal of (perhaps idle) discussion has been made as to whether the ancients had this sentimental feeling for Nature or not. Diametrical opinions are held by Schiller and others.[1] It seems to me, however, that the real point at issue has been lost sight of. We can never tell accurately what the ancients actually felt. We cannot safely argue from the absence of direct statements the absence

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the Teutonic races. Even in England and America the representatives of this so-called modern Nature-worship are comparatively few. In the ever-increasing struggle for the material things of life, the multitude hurries on with no eyes for the charm of Nature. It is of such people that one of the most recent and gifted of England's poets writes in the following lines:—

'Above, the bland day smiles serene,
Birds carol free,
In thunderous throes of life divine
Leaps the glad sea.
But they, their days and nights are one.
What is't to them that rivulets run,
Or what concern of theirs the sun?'

[1] See *Biese*, 17 ff.

of certain feelings. It is probable that they had this feeling, at least in germ,[1] for human nature remains more or less the same in all ages.

Only what constitutes the great fundamental difference between the ancient and the modern world in this question, is that the latter has discovered the infinite possibilities of Nature in art, not merely as suggesting a few metaphors to poetry or decorations formed of birds and garlands and flowers to painting, but as one of the most important, independent fields for art to work in. This distinction is a matter of observation and knowledge; anything else is a matter of mere speculation.

The above remarks apply likewise to Dante. While we find but little actual evidence of a sentimental feeling for Nature in his works, we may conclude that he did possess some such feeling as we have to-day, only not so highly developed, not so self-conscious, and especially not regarded as of such high importance in art.

In the first canto of the *Inferno*, we are told

[1] Cf. Humboldt, *Cosmos*, ii. 372 ff. (Bohn's ed.); also, Burckhardt, ii. 15.

that the morning hour and the sweet season of spring combined to give courage to the mind of the wanderer; and the melancholy which the twilight hour brings in its train is admirably rendered in the description of the Valley of Princes in Purgatory. He knew, too, that the effect of an action is increased when the scenery harmonises with it. The gloom and horror of Dante's lost condition is heightened by the dark forest in which he has gone astray; the beautiful scenery on the seashore in Purgatory is typical of the hope and joy of the souls that are there punished. So, too, the death and post-mortem fate of Buonconte is enhanced by showing us the body tossed about and rolled along by the turbid waters of the flood.

Whether it be true or not that Dante climbed mountains for the sake of the view, as Burckhardt claims, no one who knows thoroughly the *Divina Commedia*, who is acquainted with the really large number of beautiful touches of Nature it contains, can help believing that the man who could paint such striking pictures must have had an appreciation of and a genuine love for their beauty. No mere intellectual interest or physical enjoyment could

account for the exquisite language in which the stars are described, or for such expressions as we find scattered all over the *Divina Commedia*, referring to the various phenomena of Nature.

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